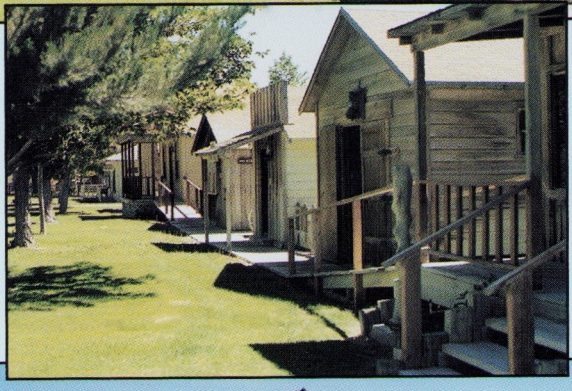
LAWS RAILROAD MUSEUM

LAWS
RAILROAD MUSEUM
and
HISTORICAL VILLAGE
BISHOP, CALIFORNIA



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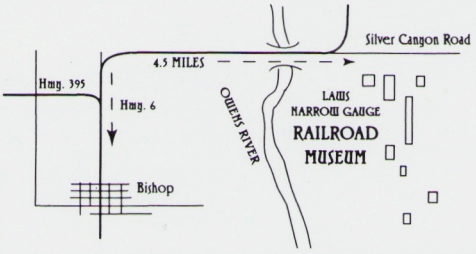
Admission $3.00 Per Person Suggested



LOCATION: 4.5 miles N.E. of Bishop on Hwy. 6

RECEPTION CENTER, guest register, gift shop, books, souveniers
CAMERA SHOP, rare and interesting cameras, photos
GENERAL STORE, early western mercantile store
WESTERN DISPLAY, saddles, brands, barbed wire, horse-drawn hearse, rare and special-made horse shoes
POST OFFICE, last original Post Office used at Laws
STOVE ROOM, antique stoves and lanterns
PRINT SHOP, printing equipment dating back to 1880
PIONEER BUILDING, antique bathtubs, guns, radios, telephones, musical instruments, sewing machines, and military items
FIRE STATION, antique fire equipment and automobiles
MEDICAL BUILDING, old medical displays and barber shop
ORIGINAL 1883 AGENT HOUSE
ORIGINAL 1883 DEPOT
TRAIN RESTORATION BARN, Death Valley Brill Car
1909 NARROW GAUGE ENGINE AND FREIGHT CARS
RANCH HOUSE, restored 1920's house and furnishngs, doll collection
BOTTLE HOUSE, extensive bottle collection
WELLS FARGO BUILDING, rock displays, assay equipment, Indian artifacts
LIBRARY AND ARTS BUILDING, rare books, art, musical instruments
1909 SCHOOL HOUSE, original restored Laws school house
WAGON BARN, wagon and buggy collection, rare tractor and engines
ANTIQUE TOOL DISPLAY
AUTO GARAGE
ASSAY OFFICE
BLACKSMITH SHOP
RAILROAD TIE BARN
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MINING EQUIPMENT AND STAMP MILLS
ORIGINAL TURNTABLE, WATER TANK AND OIL TANKS

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Area residents and visitors pack the grounds of the Laws Museum and Historic Site to take in some railroad history.

Old West buildings and boardwalk guide visitors through the settlement history of Owens Valley. Each building is devoted to a single subject or period.

Laws Museum

11 intriging acres of history

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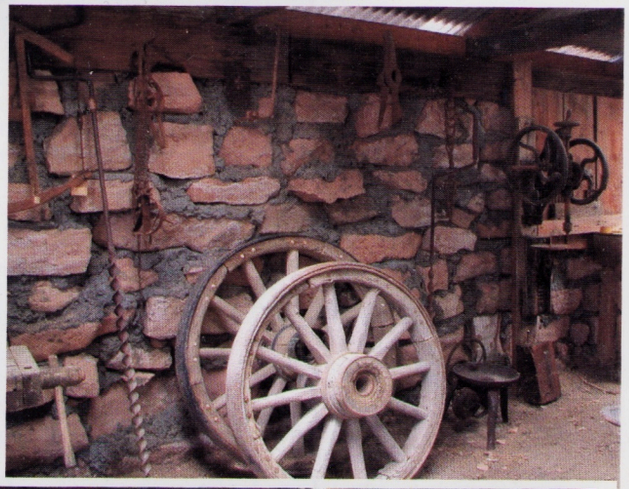

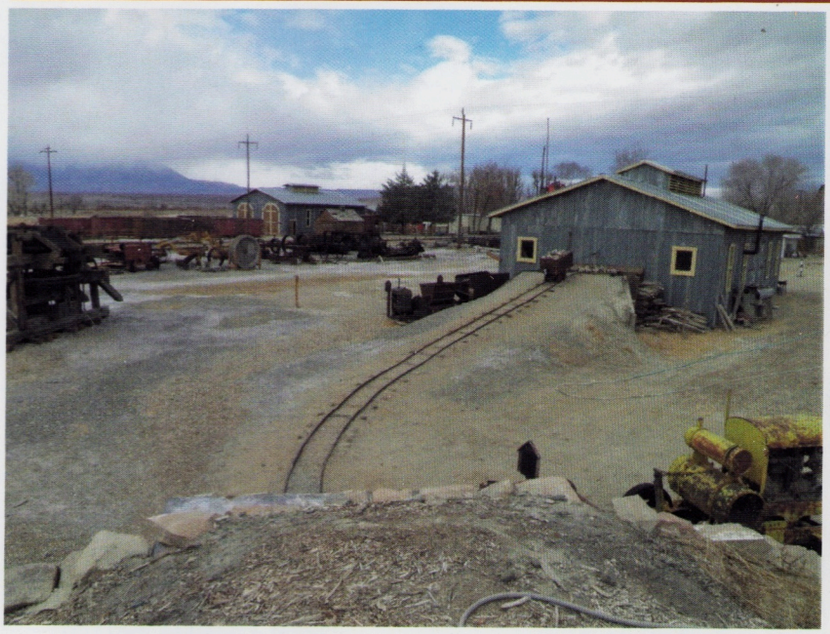

www.lawsmuseum.org

20 Mule Team practices the art of jumping the chain west of Bishop.

Photo courtesy Jen Roeser

Photo by Mike Chacanaca

After making the journey from Joliet, Mont. to Bishop, one of the two new 20 Mule Team borax wagons was unloaded in Bishop in December. Lee Roeser holds the breaks, Jim Cameron guides the tongue and Bob Behrendt looks on as the wagon is lowered off a trailer.

A history in borax

Full-scale replica wagons join 20 Mule Team

By Kristina Blüm

In 1917, the 20 Mule Team rumbled down the streets of Washington, D.C., in celebration of the inauguration for President Woodrow Wilson. In 2017, 100 years later, the 20 Mule Team is scheduled to return to the nation's capital for the Fourth of July parade. This time, the "big hitch" will be pulling two brand new, exact replicas of the borax wagons that were originally built in the 1880s to haul borax for Pacific Coast Borax Company in Death Valley.

"It has taken many years getting to this point of having the wagons recreated," said Bobby Tanner, who drives the wagons and supplies the mules for the team. "It's been a great project, solving the mysteries and sorting out facts from fiction about the team. We did everything we could to make sure these were exactly what was built by the borax company for hauling borax out of Death Valley."

They were perhaps one of the most exciting Christmas presents that the Eastern Sierra has ever received. The two full-scale borax wagon replicas, the only known operable Death Valley borax wagons in existence, arrived just in time for the 20 Mule Team crew to practice with them for a few days before taking the wagons and the team to Pasadena for the Tournament of Roses Parade on Jan. 2, just like the 1917 20 Mule Team, which also was in the Rose Parade.

"Seeing these wagons in person for the first time, you are really awe-struck by their scale and craftsmanship, especially the wheels," said Henry Golas, from the Death Valley Conservancy, which was the organization that spearheaded the efforts to have the wagons built. "Then, seeing them hooked up to the 20 Mule Team and moving is just awe-inspiring. They are actually moving works of art."

Tanner estimated that the Death Valley Conservancy raised more than $300,000 for the project and borax company Rio Tinto Borates also contributed significant funds to help make the wagons a reality.

Golas tells the story of how the new wagons came about. One day in 2009, he and Tanner were having lunch together in Santa Barbara and the two men started musing about how the wagons set on display at Harmony Borax Works in Death Valley were likely the only surviving set of the world-famous wagons that once operated between Death Valley and Mojave.

There is another set of wagons in Boron, and while historic, they were smaller in scale and were likely operated before the custom larger borax wagons were built, Golas said.

When the two men realized this, they decided to work together to see if they could create a full-scale working reproduction set of the wagons, recreating them in as close to the methods as would have been used in the 1880s.

"The 20 Mule Team and borax heritage are inextricably intertwined with that of Death Valley, so this project

was a natural fit for Death Valley Conservancy," said Golas. "We had also seen the emotional and enthusiastic public response to Bobby operating the 20 Mule Team and borax wagons at mule Days in Bishop and felt it was important to keep the legacy, knowledge and working technology of the men, mules and those massive wagons for future generations to see and experience."

Then came the years of research.

Tanner, Golas and others poured over historic accounts of the 20 Mule Team and wagons, scoured archives such as the National Park Service, U.S. Borax archives, Bancroft and Huntington libraries, the Gene Autry Museum and any other resources they could get their hands on, looking for pictures, films or documentation that could give them any details into the original construction of the wagons. They even traveled to the Furnace Creek to study remnants of the original wagons and the set of wagons displayed in Harmony Valley. They studied every detail, right down to the type of woods that were used to build the wagons.

"It was hard finding out exactly what wagons were used in Death Valley," Tanner said.

Large-scale freighting mule operations were done throughout the Eastern Sierra and all over the western United States, which made sifting through folklore to find Death Valley wagons a challenge.

Golas said one interesting thing that they discovered was that the original wagons, which were built in Mojave, were oiled rather than painted like the later wagons that were used for advertising.

Then began the search for someone to take all the research and turn it into reality.

"Of course it took fundraising to construct the wagons but also finding the right person who could make the wagons with our criteria of them being historically accurate," Golas said. "After several years, we came across Dave Engel and after five minutes of meeting him, we knew he was the craftsman who shared our vision and had the necessary talents and abilities."

It took 10 months for the wagons to be built at Dave Engel's specialty wagon shop, Engel's Coach Shop, located in Joliet, Mont. Workers there began constructing the wagons in February 2016 and completed the wagons in December.

As soon as the wagons arrived in Bishop, Tanner and his team began practicing, familiarizing the mules to the massive wagons. The bells jingled across the desert west of Bishop and social media was inundated with pictures, videos and excited remarks from 20 Mule Team fans. Golas said the Death Valley Conservancy Facebook page received more than four million views within 10 days as the wagons arrived.

The long-eared critters who pull the wagons do so as a side job. During the summer months, the mule celebrities of the 20 Mule Team are hard at work at Reds Meadow Pack Station.

The pack station, which is owned by the Tanner family, was approached by Rio Tinto to supply the mules to pull a smaller set of replica wagons in 1998. These smaller, blue-colored wagons, Tanner explained, were more like the promotional wagons that the 20 Mule Teams would have pulled for circuses or fairs, rather than the ones that were actually used in Death Valley.

The next project will be to build a replica water wagon to add to the team.

When the new wagons are not in use, they will be stored in a wagon barn, yet to be constructed, at Laws Railroad Museum and Historic Site for the public to view. Laws volunteer Howard Holland said in April that the museum had its permits in place to begin building the barn and was preparing to start the construction process.

Golas said it just makes sense for the wagons to be kept in Bishop. Part of the purpose of the new wagons is for people to see and experience the history of the 20 Mule Team, especially the complete display of the wagons with the mules for events like Mule Days. Keeping the wagons in Bishop, Golas said, is in keeping with the close-knit history of the Owens Valley and Death Valley and honors the proud heritage of Bishop.

Photo by Kemmick/LastBestNews.com

Calvin Roorda moves a wheel he's doing some finishing work on at the Engel Coach Shop in Joliet, Mont.

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Bobby Tanner and his crew bring Borax 20-Mule Team Wagons down the Mule Days Parade Route in 2017.

After a roundabout trip, the Borax Wagons are Home at Laws

The instantly recognizable Borax 20-Mule Team Wagons took a bit of a roundabout route to their new home in an impressive, brand new barn at the Laws Railroad Museum and Historic Village.

The first leg of that journey involved nearly a decade of research and work and fundraising that eventually resulted in the construction of the huge, historically accurate wagons and the gear needed to hitch 20 mules to the two big freight wagons and the water tank rolling behind them.

Once the wagons were ready to roll in 2016, they were re-introduced to the public by rolling down some pretty impressive boulevards. First came the Pasadena Rose Parade, a California New Year's Day tradition known around the world. Then the wagons and mules ventured through Washington, D.C. to help celebrate Independence Day on the National Mall in the nation's capital.

While those parades have their fans and carry a tad of prestige in the world's eyes, in the Eastern Sierra the crowning achievement of the 20-Mule Team Borax Wagons came when the whole outfit starred as one of the crowd favorites during several trips down Bishop's Main Street during the annual Mule Days Parade.

The local pride came from two sources. First was the familiar face of longtime Eastern Sierra packer and teamster Bobby Tanner who helped bring the wagons back to life and personally maneuvers the huge wagons pulled by 20 mules, working two abreast, down the parade route. Second, the 20-Mule Team and Borax are both local products and local legends that contributed mightily to the notoriety and ongoing mystique of the Death Valley region, Inyo County's premiere tourist attraction.

Finally, after dazzling yet another Mule Days crowd this year, the wagons headed for their new permanent home. On Memorial Day, May 28, a crowd of about 100 came to Laws to help dedicate the new, Borax 20-Mule Team Wagon Barn.

The big wagons were in the barn and, even without a cadre of mules, dazzled the crowd. The big, back wheels are 7-feet high. The wagon box towers above the big wheels. The wagons are made of a beautiful, lightly stained wood. In contrast, dozens of black bolts dot the wagon boxes in a testament to the authentic wagon-building trades that created the rolling historical replicas. The barn itself is first-class. The skylights in the roof send splashes of sunshine on the wagons. Long, white walls await additional photos and explanatory text. Those final touches will be added as time goes on, thanks to a collaboration between Laws and the Bishop-based American Mule Museum.

Besides those two local groups, the non-profit Death Valley Conservancy and Rio Tinto Borates (formerly Pacific Coast Borax), also played critical roles in bringing the 20-Mule Team back home to Inyo County.

Tanner addressed the crowd and recalled how, about 10 years ago, he contacted Howard Holland, the talented exhibit designer and board member of Laws Museum, with what Tanner called "a scheme" to build replica borax wagons. And now, after years of work and even more "scheming," the wagons and their new home at Laws are a reality.

While touring the country with the wagons, Tanner said the real "eye opener" was that so many people, whether in Kansas, Ohio or Maryland, recognized the 20 mule team and wagons. Especially those from farm families or those who were familiar with mules, "knew exactly what they were looking at" when they

Continued on page 7

Borax Wagons

Continued from page 6

approached the huge wagons. Part of the reason for the wagons' notoriety, he added, came from "Ron Reagan" who hosted the TV show "Death Valley Days," sponsored by Borax and featuring the wagons. Of course, "Ron" is also known as the former governor of California, president of the United States and, most importantly, one-time Grand Marshall of the Mule Days Parade.

While the 20-mule team can seem like "a local thing," Tanner assured the crowd that "this is a significant deal," and the Borax wagons and the 20-mule team is still "an American icon."

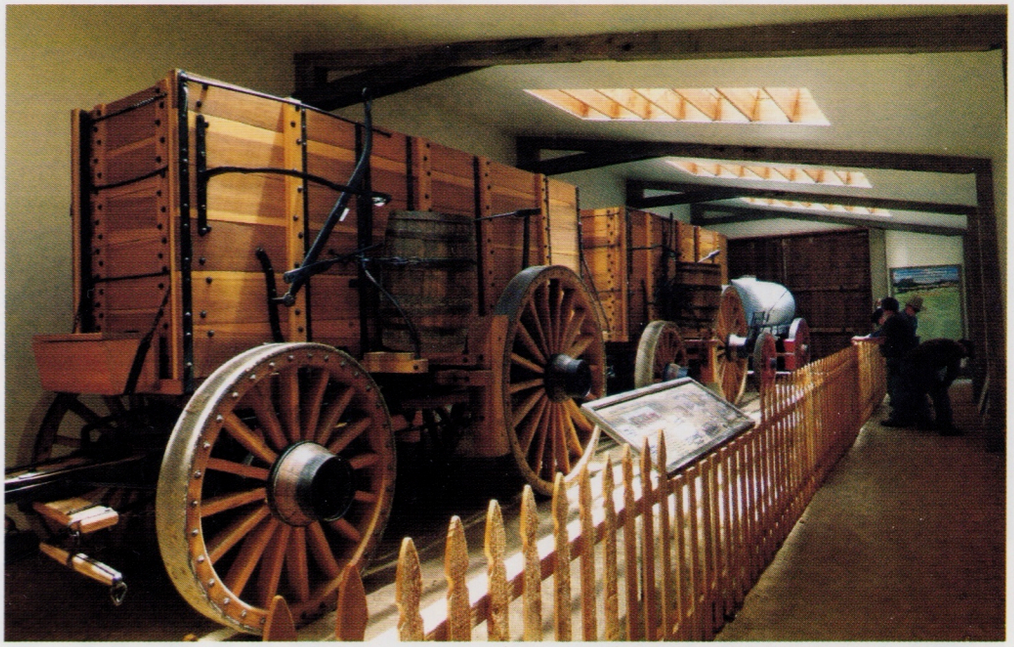
Tanner then recalled how one man had an out-sized impact on the wagon project. In 1999, Rose Parade officials contacted Borax and asked if the company could bring the famed wagons and mules to the parade. The company had marketed "20-Mule Team Borax" from 1906 to1950. But most company officers did not want to revive the wagons.

But one corporate officer turned that thinking around and started the process to bring the wagons back, Tanner said as a way to introduce Preston Chiaro. He was managing the Boron mine at the time, and knew the Eastern Sierra. More important, he knew the Tanner family as the packers at Red's Meadow.

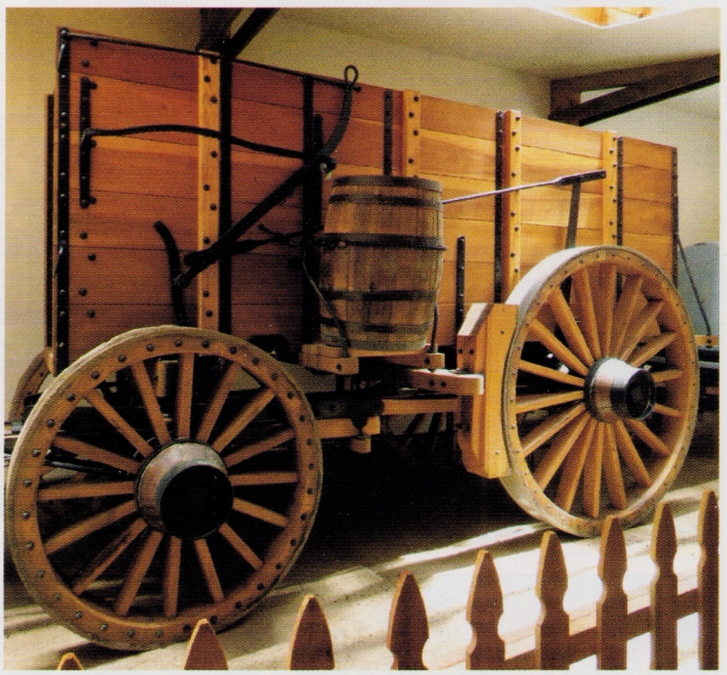
He got the wagon idea turned around in the corporate offices. Then he was able to see the project through to completion since he eventually became president of US Borax, which was owned by Rio Tinto at the time – the most recent name for the Borax Company, which was known as Pacific Coast Borax when it built the first borax wagons to haul the mineral out of its Death Valley mines.

"These wagons have a real power," Chiaro told the crowd. "It's the power of an idea, and that idea is the development of the West."

Chiaro noted that Rio Tinto put up a $150,000 challenge grant that made the fabrication of the wagons possible, along with the outpouring of support and donations from individuals and organizations. Another, even tougher obstacle was who could manage the mules and wagons. "Driving a 20-mule team was a lost art," he said. Enter Bobby Tanner and his crew. Then came years of painstaking research followed by exacting construction and fabrication using 19th and early 20th century wagon-building skills and "technology."

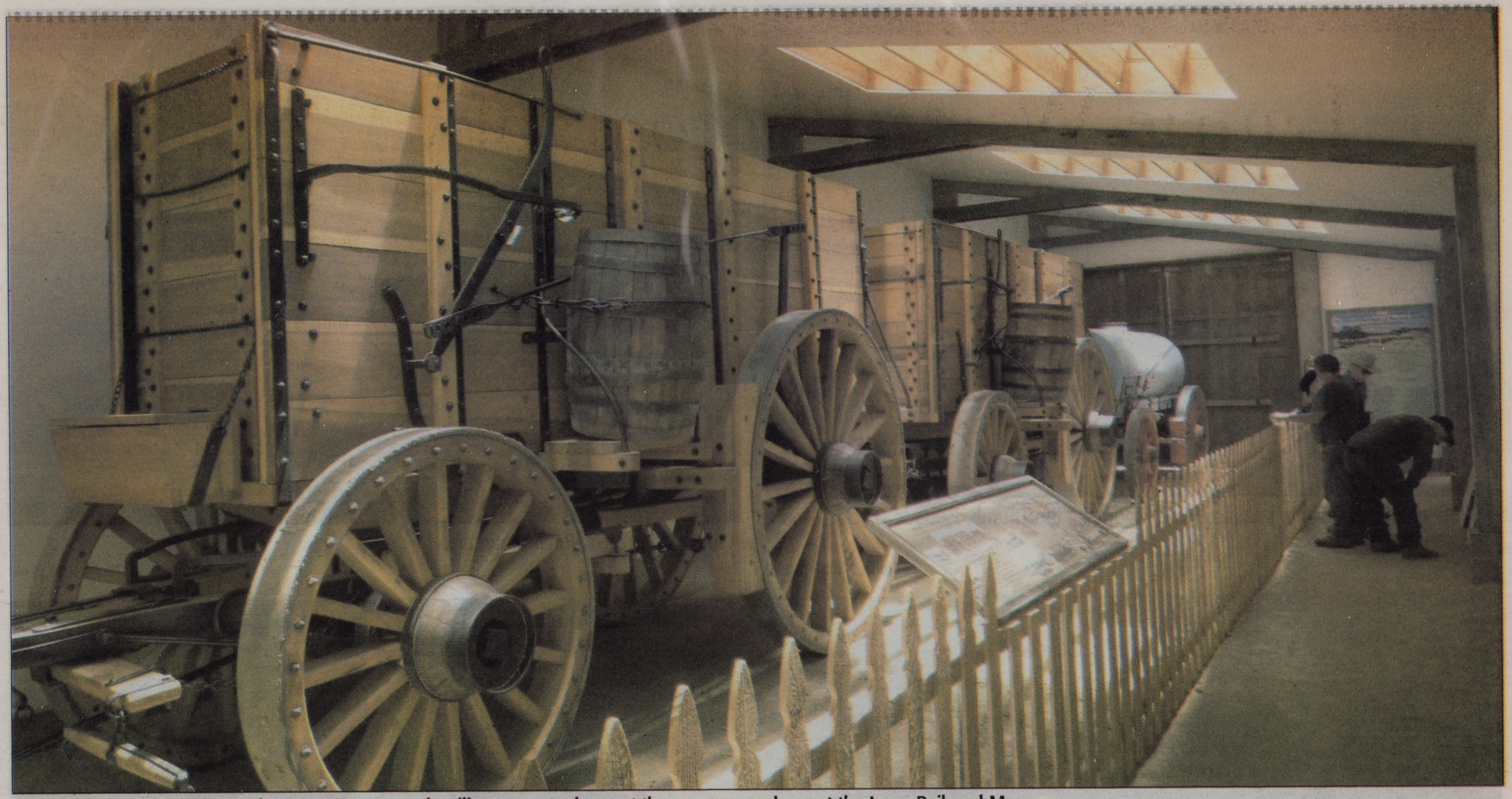


Two, huge Borax 20-Mule Team Wagons and trailing water tank at the new wagon barn at the Laws Railroad Museum.



Once completed and rolling, Chiaro noted that a special aspect of the sight of the wagons in action is that "there is a beauty about it," as 20 mules work in unison and respond to the commands of the teamsters. After watching the mules and wagons perform in parades large and small, Chiaro said it is easy to see the "magic" created by the imposing, vintage vehicles. "It sparks peoples' imagination."

And now, people can visit the wagons in their new, home barn at Laws, and let their imagination run wild.



These two, huge Borax 20-Mule Team Wagons and trailing water tank are at the new wagon barn at the Laws Railroad Museum.

2018

Photo by Jon Klusmire

Pathways to Discovery

the inside eastside magazine

Volume 4 • August 2018

A look back in time

Celebrating the hisory of the Eastside

INSIDE

Laws Museum and the Slim Pincess

Raising a ghost town back to life

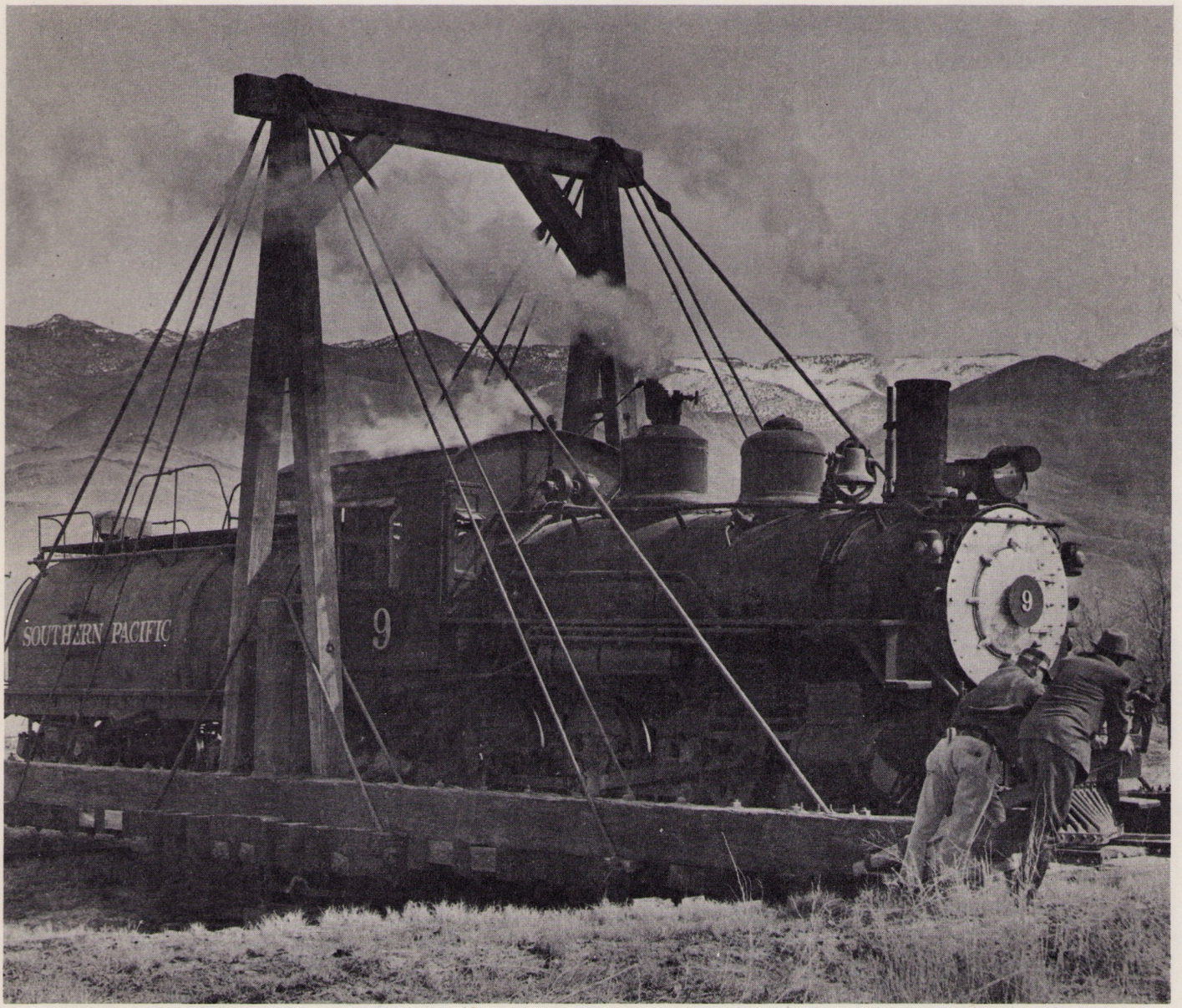
The Eastern California Museum

A SPECIAL PUBLICATION OF The Inyo Register

LAWS RAILROAD MUSEUM and HISTORICAL SITE

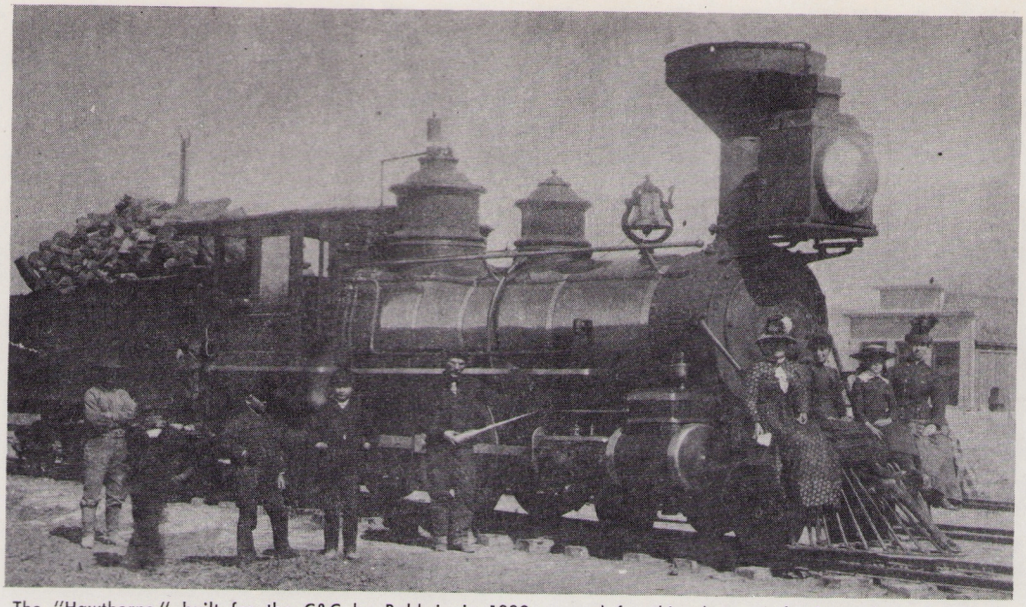
Bishop, Inyo County, California In the World's Deepest Valley, says the Sierra Club

RESTORATION, PRESERVATION . . . The Keys to Our Heritage



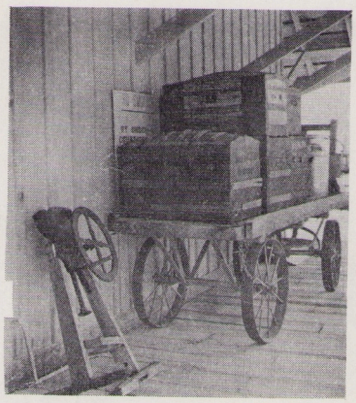
—Curt Phillips Photo.

In 1960 the famous old Slim Princess made her last run through Owens Valley. A number of years later through the efforts of Mrs. Lois Cleman, the late Senator Chas. Brown and a number of other preservation-minded persons approximately 12 acres of land at Laws and the railroad facilities were given as a gift to the county of Inyo. Later the Bishop Museum and Historical Society was formed and a permanent home was established at Laws to restore and preserve the historical railroad station. What started out first to be just a railroad museum has grown into a popular show case reminiscent of practically every phase of pioneer life in the Owens Valley. There are now four buildings which house relics and mementoes of days gone by. The museum complex was made possible through the concerted efforts of the county of Inyo, the City of Bishop and the museum society.



The "Hawthorne," built for the C&C by Baldwin in 1882, paused for this photo at the Laws depot in the spring of 1888, seven years after the three-foot rails first reached Inyo County. The tender is piled high with pinon wood that fueled engines pulling the Slim Princess through what were then the lush meadows of the Owens Valley. The Hawthorne, a 4-4-0 type engine, with 14 x 18 cylinders, served the C&C, and the SP-operated Nevada and California Railway which succeeded it, for 25 years. It was scrapped in 1907.—Eastern Calif. Museum.

One of the relics on display at the Laws Railroad Museum is this old laminated pulley wheel which once was used in the Wilshire Mine on Bishop Creek. It was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Wells Hall.



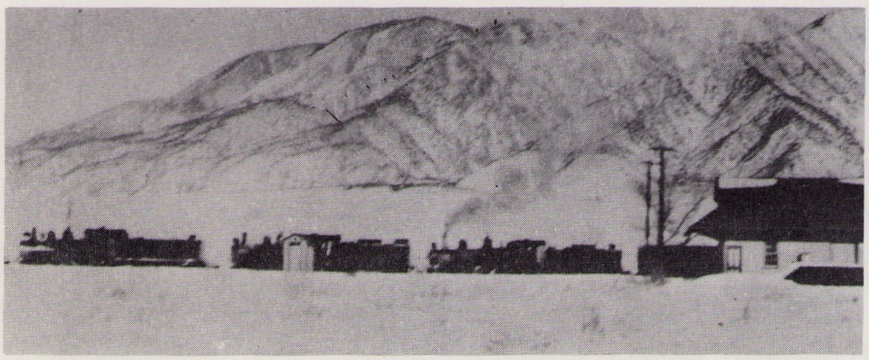
One of the most popular attractions at the Railroad Museum is the Blue Goose, a motorized rail car donated to the museum by the Pacific Coast Borax Company.

While the Slim Princess was still running prior to 1960 a number of Railroad and camera clubs took advantage of the fact and organized trips to the colorful Laws depot. They are pictured here greeted at the station by a local contingent from the Bishop Chamber of Commerce and local residents dressed in historical costumes. A bit of high jinx added flavor to one of the excursions when members of the local saddle club "held up" the train as it made its last lap.—Curt Phillips Photo.

Members of the crew and railroad officials are shown with No. 7, the "Benton," during a stop at Candelaria Depot in 1895. Candelaria, a mining town, was located off of the main line of the Carson and Colorado and midway on the 300-mile run from Keeler in the south to Mound House in the north. North and south-bound trains would stop for the night at Candelaria in the middle of their two-day run from end-to-end of the line.—Eastern Calif. Museum.

Students at the Laws School in the spring of 1888 were, top row, from left: Mamie Pendell, Ethel Hardy, John Dehy, Katie Hardy, Will Dehy, Hattie Mann, Ida Plumley. Second row: Lena Plumley, Stella Mann, Katie Ehlen, Miss Voorhies (teacher), Ed Dehy, Katie McNally, Minnie McGee, Myrtle McGee. Third row: Jim Dehy, George Hardy, Steve Morehouse, Frank Welch, Allie McNally, Horace Hardy, Henry Ehlen, Sanford Plumley.—Eastern Calif. Museum.

Since the C&C was built to tap mines on the eastern side of the Owens Valley, it missed the population centers. When the "Slim Princess" began its run, it was met by stages from the towns. Bishop's motor stage, shown here, made its first run to Laws in 1913.—Eastern California Museum.

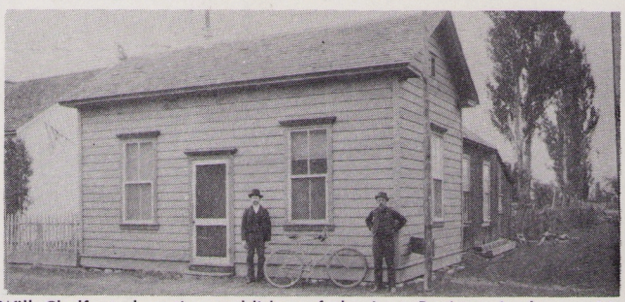


Although the Carson and Colorado was planned to be 500 miles long, it was mostly a flat route with only one grade worthy of concern. That was Mt. Montgomery—not imposing as western mountains go—but steep enough to require northbound trains to be "triple-headed" before they could leave for Nevada.—Clarabelle Hawkins Collection.

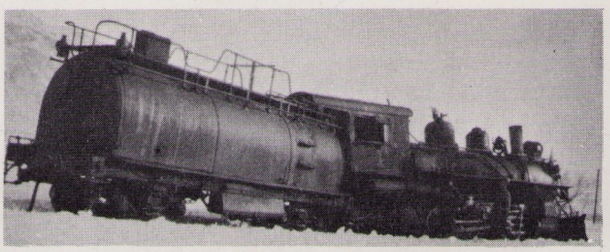
Engines 11 and 12, both hand-me-down engines from another Southern Pacific subsidiary, were double-headed to pull the Slim Princess across Montgomery Pass in the winter. Note the open-ended passenger coach behind No. 12. Both engines were scrapped in 1934.—Eastern Calif. Museum.

Engines pulling the Slim Princess across Montgomery Pass during the winter had to carry plows, even though snows on that pass are lighter than on the Sierra Nevada to the west. The narrow gauge rails, at the time of this picture ran to Mina, From that point the Southern Pacific had broad-gauged the line north to Hazen, but left the third rail to Mound House so that, until 1938, both narrow and standard gauge trains traveled the three-track line through central Nevada.—Eastern Calif. Museum.

Main St. of Bishop in 1912 was busy, not with fishermen, but with ranchers and businessmen from throughout the Owens Valley. At that time, water was still in the valley and the narrow gauge carried a variety of agricultural products to market.—Eastern Calif. Museum.

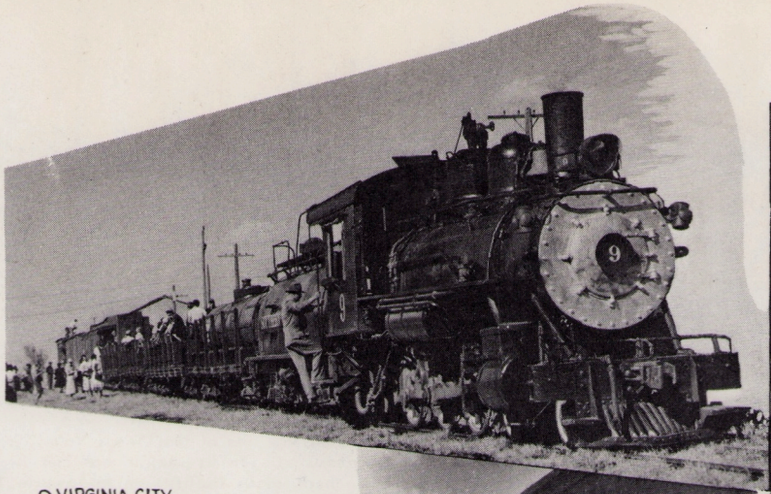


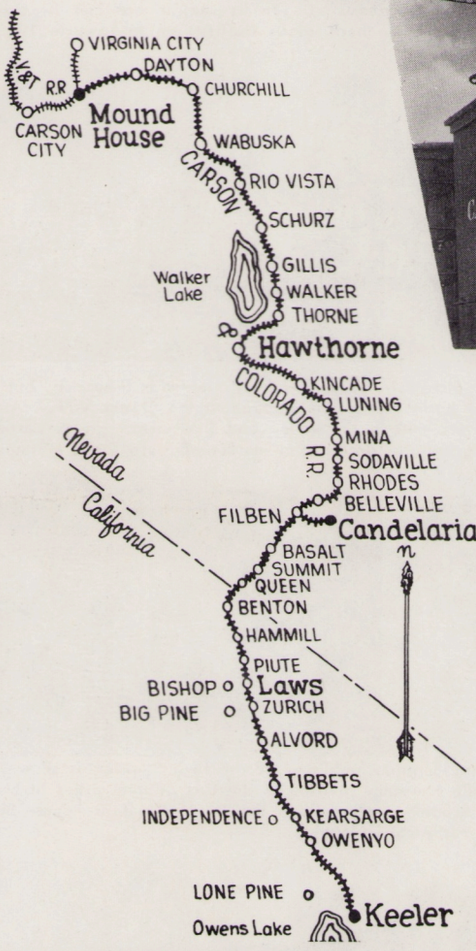
Will Chalfant, long-time publisher of the Inyo Register, is shown with Bertina Henslip Hussanny in front of the first printing office in Bishop, located on Academy, adjacent to the P. A. Chalfant home.—Bishop Museum and Historical Society.



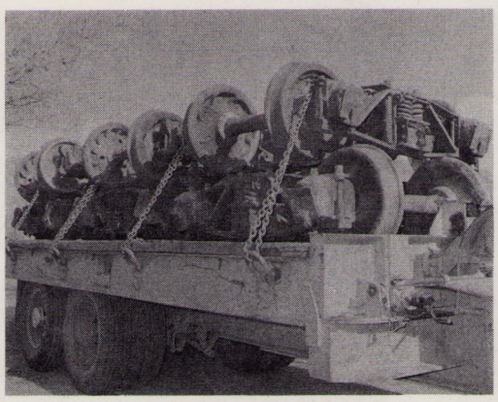
Engine No. 1, shown stuck in the snow, was built by Baldwin in 1914, came to the S.P. narrow gauge from the Nevada-California-Oregon Railway, and was sold to the Nevada County Narrow Gauge RR in 1933. In ended its career with the U.S. Navy—Clarabelle Hawkins Collection.

Benton Station stands alone in the winter snows of the Montgomery Pass area, waiting for the arrival of the daily mixed train. The station went out of business in 1938, when the Southern Pacific tore up the 50 miles of track between Benton and Tonopah Junction.—Clarabelle Hawkins Collection.





Prior to the closure of the famous old narrow gauge line in 1960 by the Southern Pacific and the transfer of the engine to the county of Inyo the Laws depot was a mecca for southland clubs, especially the railroad buffs. The Chamber of Commerce at Bishop was always prepared for the visits and rolled out the red carpet whenever possible. Historical costumes and ancient vehicles, as the one shown in the lower photo, added a pioneer touch to the excursions.
—Curt Phillips Photo.



When U. S. Borax Co. sent the Blue Goose into permanent retirement at the Laws Museum, it also sent along a supply of railroad trucks, perhaps to serve as spare parts for other acquisitions in the depot yards.

Southern Pacific retired steam from the narrow gauge in 1955, but kept one Locomotive, No. 9, in reserve until abandonment five years later. Most of the freight was southbound, and a string of empty cars, shown behind No. 9, was a common sight at Laws in the last years.—Curt Phillips Photo.

GIFT DEED

In appreciation of the interest of Inyo County and the City of Bishop in preserving the memory of the Far West's last common carrier narrow-gauge railroad, the Keeler Branch, Southern Pacific Company is pleased to donate steam locomotive No. 9 together with other rolling stock, and the Laws Station building and surrounding installations for safekeeping in behalf of generations to come.

Chalfant Press
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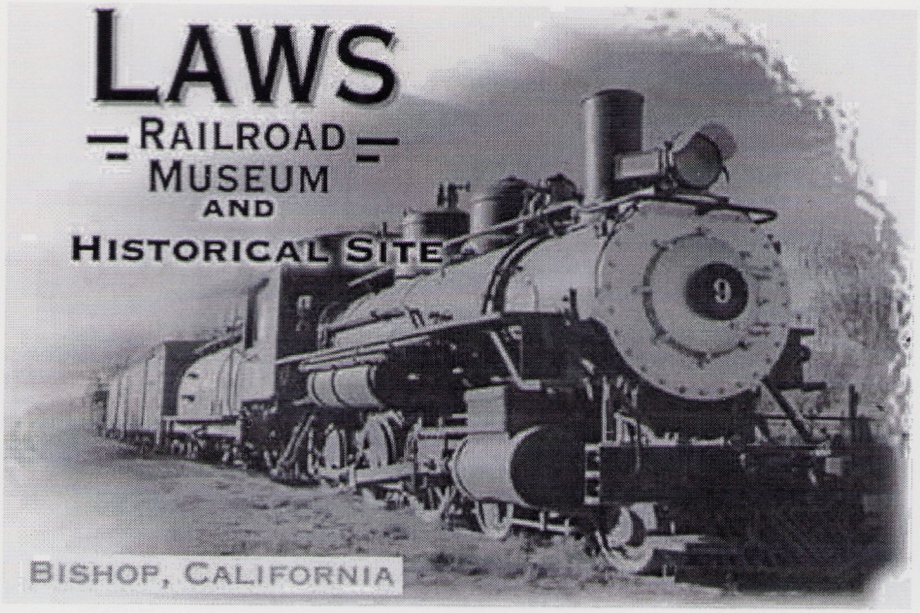


engine #9 at the Laws museum

OPEN ALL YEAR : VISITING HOURS - 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Admission by donation.

operated by the
Bishop Museum & Historical Society
PO BOX 363 Bishop, California 93515
(760) 873-5950

"11 Acres of Unique Exhibits"

The Story Of Laws...

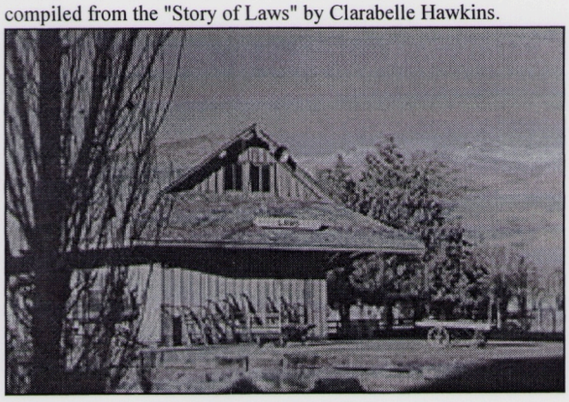
On May 20, 1880, the Carson and Colorado Railroad Company was formed and incorporated by William Sharon, Hume Yerington and Darius Mills. They planned to run the narrow gauge railroad from Mound House, Nevada, and Carson River to the Colorado River, calling it the C&C Railroad. It never reached the Colorado River but stopped at Keeler, California. It has often been referred to as "the railroad that was built 300 miles too long or 300 years too soon"

As the word was out that the railroad would run east of the Owens River, people started to arrive at what is known now as Laws. A new railroad town was built. It took 3 years for the rails to be laid from Mound House to Laws, with the first train arriving in April of 1883. The depot, agent's house, section boss's house, outhouses, water tank and turntable were all ready when it arrived.

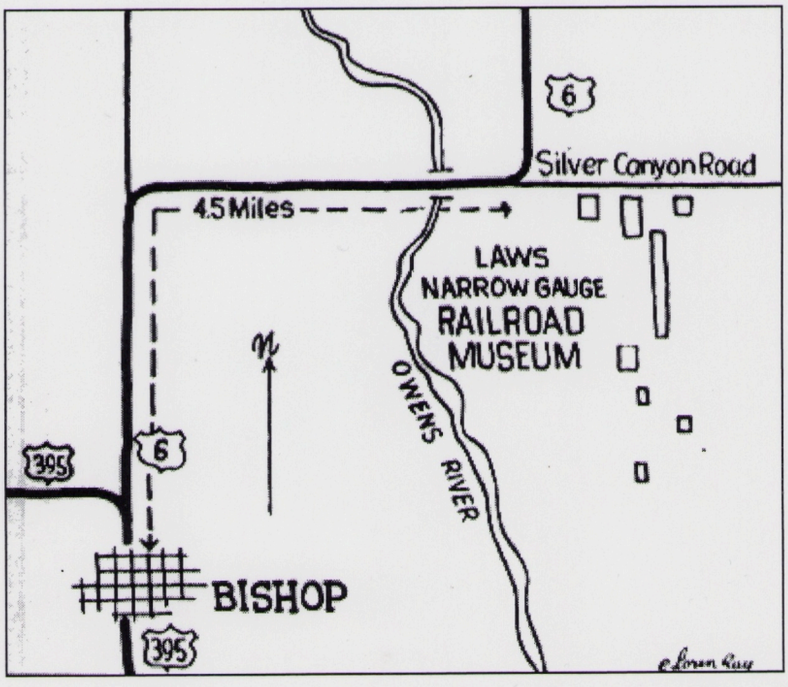
In addition to the railroad buildings other construction quickly followed which included many homes, barns, and corrals, two general stores, a rooming house, eating house, hotel, boarding house, pool hall and dance hall, blacksmith shop, post office, barber shop, powder magazine and warehouses. Several industrial buildings followed later. Many ranches surrounded Laws and used the railroad to ship their crops.

The decline and demise of Laws and the railroad were the result of the local mines closing, trucking becoming cheaper than rail freight and the city of Los Angeles buying most of the valley for the water rights. By 1959 when the railroad ceased operation, there was no trace of any of the buildings at Laws as they had all been torn down for salvage. Only the depot, agent's house, oil and water tanks and the turntable survived. All the other buildings you see at the museum today were doomed for destruction locally but were saved by being moved to the museum grounds...

compiled from the "Story of Laws" by Clarabelle Hawkins.



CLICK HERE TO SEE A LIST OF ALL THE EXHIBITS!



SNOW REPORT | WEATHER CENTER | ROAD REPORT | LOCAL NEWS | FISHING REPORT

RECEPTION CENTER - Gifts and books

CAMERA DISPLAY - Antique cameras and photos

TRADING POST - Thrift store

GENERAL STORE - Early western store

WESTERN DISPLAY - Saddles, brands and antique hearse

POST OFFICE - Last original Laws Post Office

STOVE ROOM - Antique stoves

PRINT SHOP - Printing equipment dating to 1880

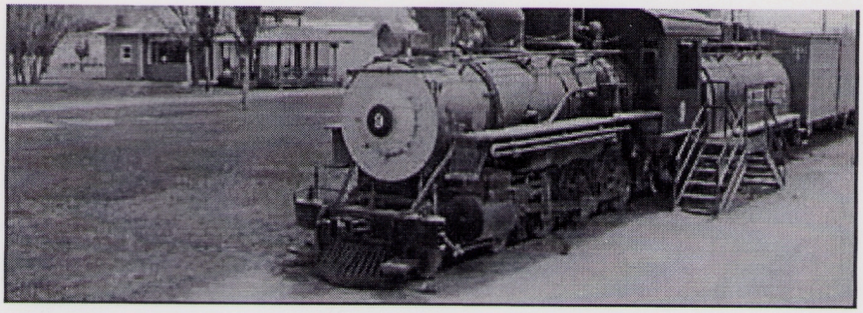
PIONEER BUILDING - Antique bathtubs, guns, radios, telephones, pianos, sewing machines and military items

FIRE STATION - Antique fire equipment and auto related items

MEDICAL BUILDING - Old medical displays & barber shop

ORIGINAL 1883 AGENT HOUSE -

ORIGINAL 1883 DEPOT - Railroad memorabilia and model train displays



ENGINE #9 AND FREIGHT CARS

CABOOSE

DEATH VALLEY CAR - 929 Self-propelled car from the Death Valley Railroad *(pictured above)*

BOX CAR VILLAGE - (not open to public)

OIL AND WATER TANKS

ORIGINAL TURNTABLE

WATER WELL

ANTIQUE FARM EQUIPMENT

MINING EQUIPMENT

MINER SHACK

ASSAY OFFICE

RAILROAD TIE BARN

AUTO GARAGE

BLACKSMITH SHOP

ANTIQUE TOOL DISPLAY

Laws Museum

WAGON BARN - Wagons, tractors and engines

ORIGINAL 1909 NORTH INYO SCHOOL HOUSE - Local school history

GAZEBO

LIBRARY AND ARTS - Also antique musical instruments

BELL RACK

WELLS FARGO BUILDING - Rock displays, assay equipment, Indian artifacts

BOTTLE HOUSE - Extensive bottle display

RANCH HOUSE - Restored circa 1900 ranch house

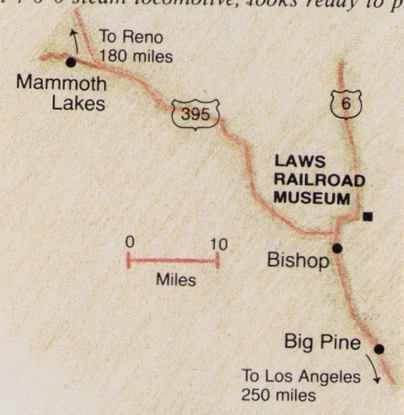
back to the main page | back to the SierraWeb homepage | back to Bishop

Slim Princes #9 - Laws Museum

MICHAEL SCANNELL

***Old Number 9,** a Baldwin 4-6-0 steam locomotive, looks ready to pull out from Laws depot with six cars behind it*

Back to the steam train era, north of Bishop



The Slim Princess was her title, and unlike most royalty she worked for a living. For nearly 80 years this narrow-gauge train steamed between Owens Valley and the mines of Nevada.

The Princess is in retirement now. But in Laws, the tiny town built to be her first station stop, you can look back at an era when a steam train was a region's lifeline to the world, and its whistle filled a quiet valley of ranches and mines.

If you're headed to the eastern Sierra for late-season skiing or early-season hiking, visit the Laws Railroad Museum and Historic Site for a 12-acre detour into 19th-century transit and business life.

In the shadow of the Sierra Nevada, echoes of the railroading past

Nevada mining magnates founded the Carson and Colorado Railroad Company in 1880, hoping to extend Nevada mining south to the Colorado River. Financial problems halted tracks near Owens Lake. Because the most direct route to the Colorado lay a little to the east of settlements like Lone Pine and Independence, stations had to be built along it. The first was called, with pioneer directness, Station, but it was soon renamed to honor the railroad superintendent, one R.J. Laws. A town of 200 soon grew up around it.

***Stationmaster's house** dates from 1883. Inside it and other buildings, you can see antique appliances, arts*

The Slim Princess hauled copper, silver, and gold from the mountains down to rail links and smelters. It also carried Owens Valley milk, hogs, barley, and alfalfa up to hungry miners and their livestock.

By the 1940s the mines were played out, and trucks proved a more economical means of transportation than rail. The railroad shut down in 1960.

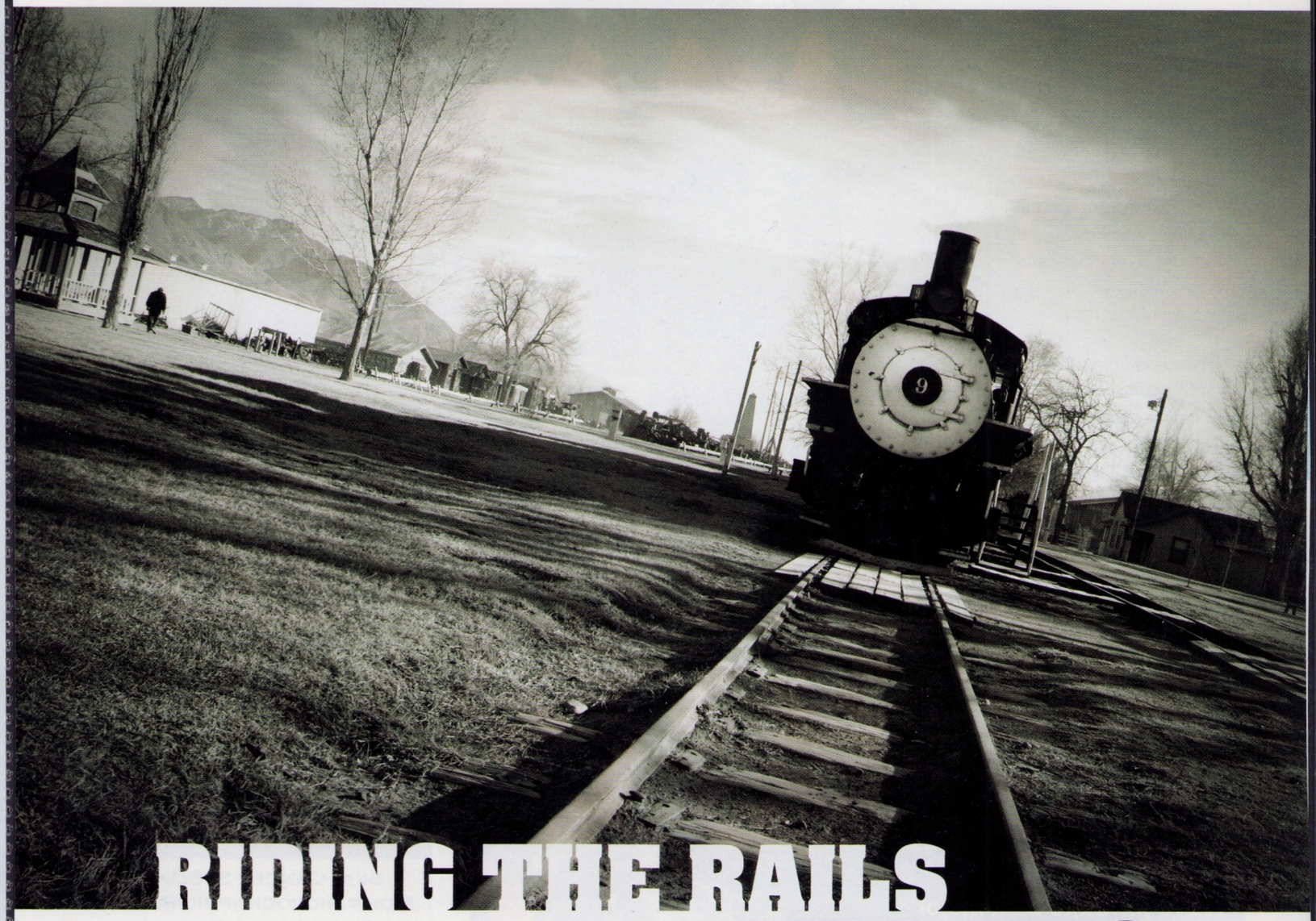
But Laws citizens worked to preserve the past. They restored 21 historic buildings and acquired the last engine to have powered the princess. It doesn't run, but you can examine the engine and peer into various freight and passenger cars.

Near the tracks is the stationmaster's house, crowded with such domestic items as a solid oak Alaska Ice Box, a Florence Lop-stitch Sewing Machine, and an 1880 pump organ whose yellowed keys museum docents will even let you play.

The *Inyo Independent* newspaper office holds presses and type trays, the Wells Fargo Bank a collection of Paiute artifacts. The Conway House is being restored to show what ranch life was like in the days before much of Owens Valley's water was shipped to Southern California. In addition, the museum office sells an unusually good collection of books on local history and railroads.

Laws Railroad Museum is open from 10 to 4 daily. From Bishop, take U.S. Highway 6 north 4½ miles; turn right at Silver Canyon Road and go ½ mile to the museum. Donations are requested. For information, call (619) 873-5950. □

April 1991



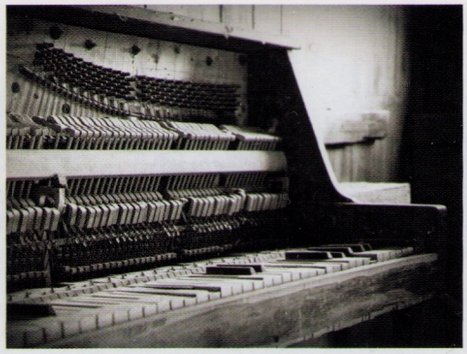
RIDING THE RAILS AT LAWS

Just north of Bishop along U.S. Route 6 stands a railroad town representing the past, full of memorabilia and memories of what once was – a thriving community centered around the "Slim Princess."

The railroad ran from the late 1800s to 1959, when it took its final run. Engine #9 now rests at the Laws Railroad Museum and Historical site. With hard work and perseverance, the Bishop Museum and Historical Society fought to preserve the historic site, which covers nearly 100 years, for people of all ages to come and explore the past. Children especially love stepping into history, seeing the bizarre tools of doctors, dentists and opticians in the medical building and barbershop or the tiny schoolhouse where their predecessors learned. Of course the train in the center of it all attracts the children the most – hanging off the side, playing conductor. The museum proves to be a fun and educational adventure, one that children can explore again and again. ◆ -BSM

Special Events

Sept. 6	Old Timers Picnic
Sept. 12	"Good Old Days" celebration: games, food, craft demonstrations and plain old-time fun. Free for everyone.
Oct. 3	The Semi annual Choo Choo Swap Meet at the Tri-County Fairgrounds benefits the museum.



Clockwise from bottom left:

A flag waves across Mount Tom at the reception center.

In the Pioneer Building see tools and guns of the Old West.

The Bed of Roses next to Engine #9 and the freight cars.

Freight cars

A piano in the Miner Shack

An old truck next to the gas pump

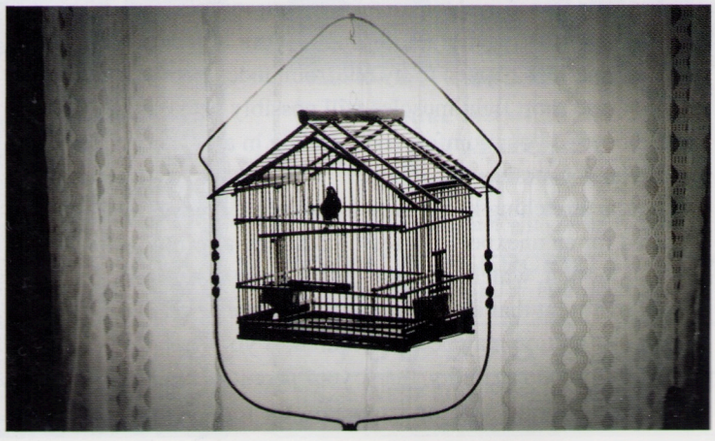
A cow skull in the Wagon Barn

Of course, bottles in the Bottle House

Ranch House bird cage

Facing page: Engine #9 takes center stage at the Laws Railroad Museum and Historical Site.

Photos by Joel St. Marie



TAKE A QUIET RETREAT INTO AN AUTHENTIC RAILROAD PAST

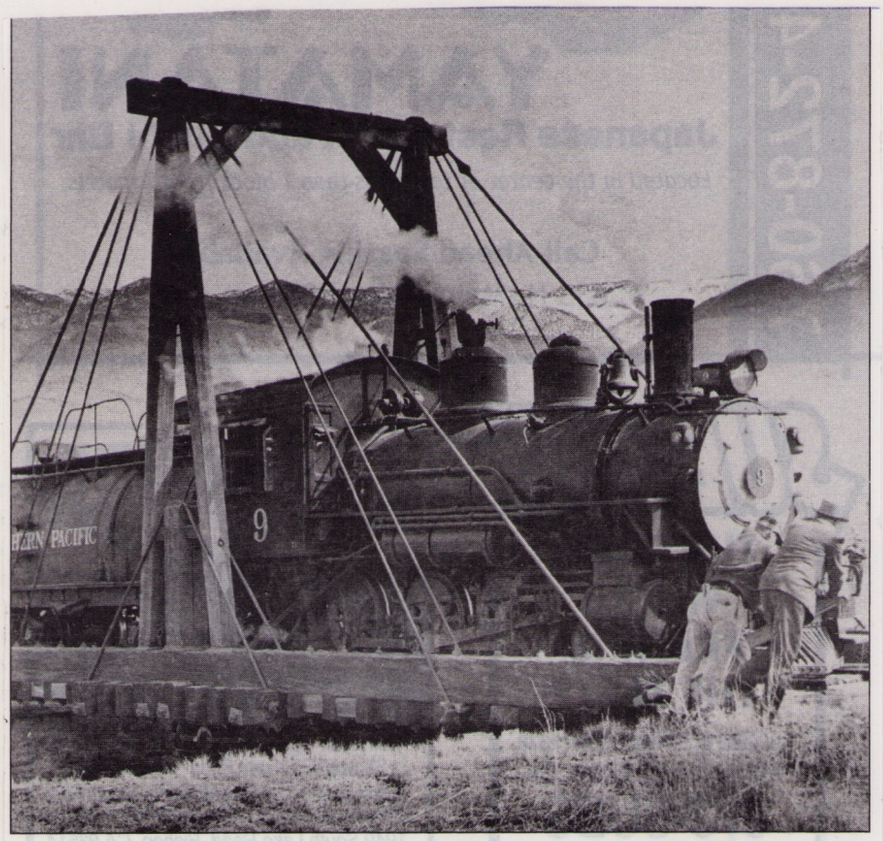
An authentic train depot at the Laws Railroad Museum just north of Bishop will give you a feeling of slowing down and returning to a simpler time. The Slim Princess locomotive that traveled through the Eastern Sierra for decades was a valuable link to the rest of the world, especially given the remoteness of the area. It was a time when automobile travel was limited, when household goods and other necessary products arrived via the train.

Riches from the active gold and silver mines of the Inyo Mountains went out on the train. Contact, precious contact arrived with provisions. The dream of the railroad's owners was to run the line all the way to the Colorado River, but simple economics and common sense ended that idea, though the train struggled on with passenger service through the mid-1900's.

Laws recreates life in an Owens Valley town during the early years of European settlement, complete with a boardwalk along a row of old buildings just begging for your exploration. The buildings are filled with historic items and goods, from general store provisions and tools to buggies and bottles.

Out on the rail, the Slim Princess, engine #9, sits ready for work. Climb up and ring the bell, just like the engineers did a century ago. Step into a restored baggage and passenger car, and imagine life on the frontier back then.

A friendly and knowledgeable staff can help you out at the interesting gift shop, where many items reflect railroad and local history. Laws is open year-round except major holidays. For more information call 760-873-5950 or visit www.lawsmuseum.org



The Slim Princess on the manually operated turntable at Laws, north of Bishop.

LAWS RAILROAD MUSEUM

TAKES YOU BACK

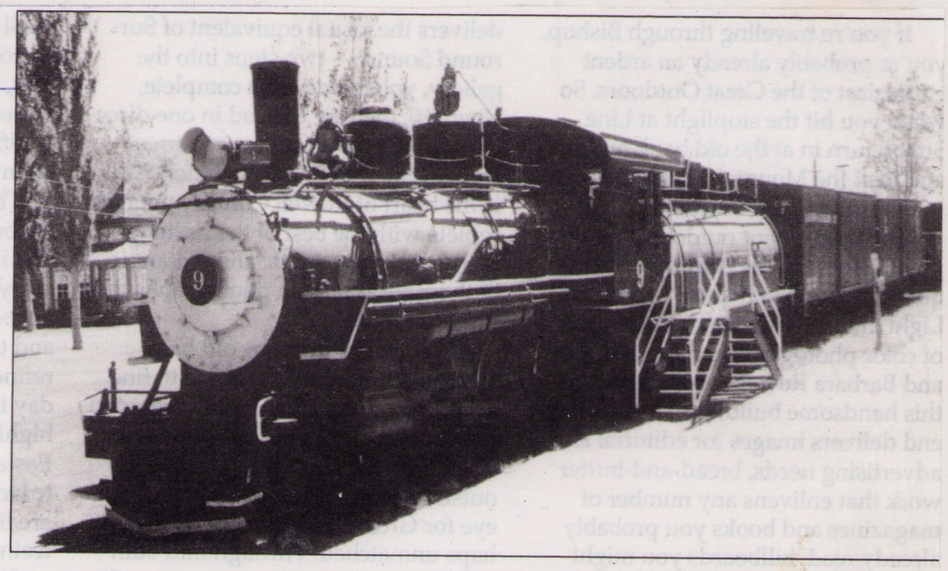
TO A SIMPLER TIME

Although outdoor sports and fabulous events may bring folks to Bishop, it's places like the Laws Railroad Museum that they remember long after they leave. The authentic train depot at the museum takes visitors back to a simpler time when the Slim Princess roared through the valley carrying passengers and cargo.

The locomotive that traveled through these parts for decades was a valuable link to the outside world in a time when automobile travel was minimal. When you visit the museum (located five miles north of Bishop on Hwy 6) you get a feel for that era and inexplicably you start forgetting about your email, your ipod and your palm pilot and start relaxing under the influence of history.

Laws recreates life in a valley town during the early years of European settlement, complete with a boardwalk along a row of old buildings just begging for your exploration. The buildings are filled with historic items and goods, from general store provisions and tools to buggies and bottles.

Mining riches left the area for bigger cities, while household goods and other products arrived via the great locomotive. Now the majestic Slim Princess itself is the center of the recreated town. Looking like it could pull a load in time for the noon whistle, the engine welcomes visitors with the bright ring of its bell. Travelers can experience the inside of a restored car used for baggage and passengers.



The Slim Princess spends her retirement at the Laws Railroad Museum entertaining visitors.

The original dream of the owners was to run the line all the way to the Colorado River, before economics and common sense ended that idea. But today you can still walk the depot area and imagine what once was, the hustle and bustle as the Slim Princess made her way into the Owens Valley and the beauty and simplicity of the time.

A friendly and knowledgeable staff can help you out at the interesting gift shop with many items reflecting the railroad history. Laws is open year-round except Tuesdays. For more information, call the museum at 760-873-5950

Train buffs roll into town for convention

Group to mark 50th anniversary of railroad's last run with visits to local sites

By Mike Gervais
Register Staff

4-29-2010

This month marks the 50th anniversary of the last run on the Southern Pacific Railroad and nearly 50 visitors are in town this week to celebrate the good ole days of the iron horse.

The Southern Pacific Narrow Gauge Historical Society, Inc. is hosting its annual convention in Inyo County, bringing 45 train buffs to the area to tour Laws Railroad Museum and sections of the Southern Pacific line from Bishop to Keeler, where the line finally ended.

Along with a few local members, the convention expects to draw visitors to the area from as far away as Colorado, Ohio and Texas, as well as Nevada and California.

While here, the group will host a barbecue, several field trips and lectures in the evening.

"One of the reasons we returned to Laws this year is because it is the 50th anniversary of the last run of the line on April 29, 1960," said South Pacific Narrow Gauge Historical Society President Dennis Burke of Lakeport, Calif.

Incorporated in May of 1880, the Carson and Colorado Railroad, later to become the Southern Pacific Railroad, completed tracks from Carson City to what is now Keeler.

For 80 years locomotives ran up and down the Eastern Sierra, moving mining ore, payrolls, passengers and local cattle. The railroad was taken offline just 11 days shy of its 80th birthday.

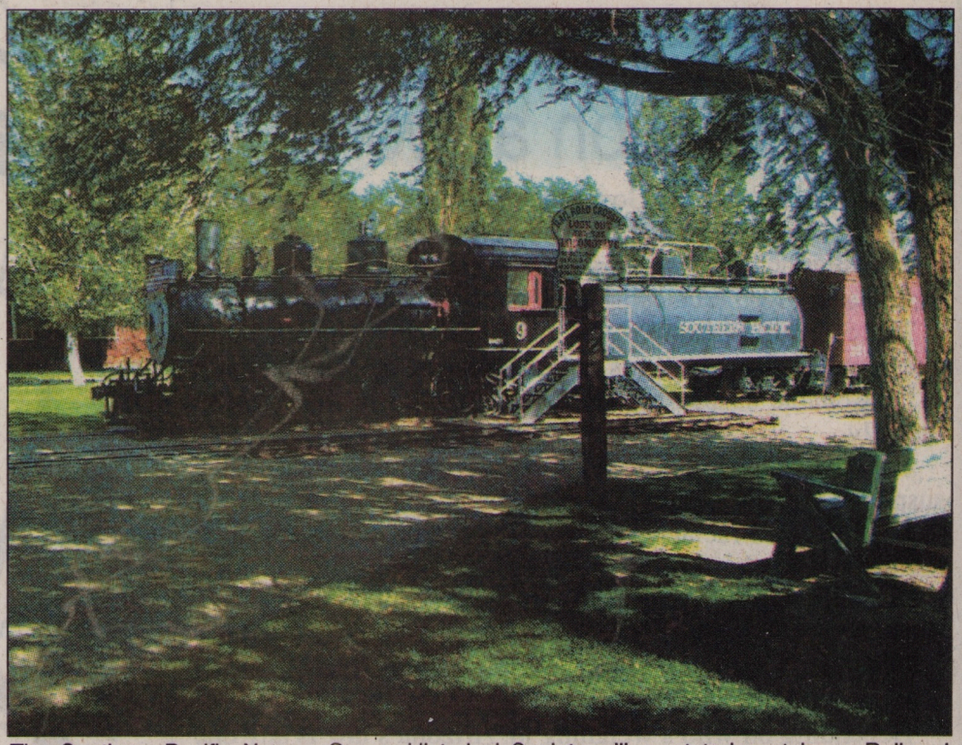
But a group of dedicated train buffs refuse to let the anniversary of the closure of the railroad go by unrecognized.

The convention kicks off today at Laws with a tour of the museum and a special ride on the Brill Car. Burke said there will also be a barbecue lunch for convention participants.

"Laws is being very generous," Burke said. "They're bringing out the Brill Car to give us a free ride and they're giving us the grounds for our barbecue."

The SP Narrow Gauge Historical Society is also receiving a lot of help from the local Carson and Colorado Railway Society, which will be hosting a field trip to Zurich, where the railroad once supported a freight depot, as well as bunk houses, a wind mill, water tank and barn.

From there convention participants will head to Independence for a barbecue and tours of several sites. The Carson and Colorado gang will also host Saturday night's presentation in the Owens Valley School gym.



The Southern Pacific Narrow Gauge Historical Society will meet today at Laws Railroad Museum to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the closure of the railway. The group also plans to tour several area sites important to railroad history. Photo by Mike Gervais

"We've got a pretty good kinship going with the guys here," Burke said, "they're really helping us out."

The group also has a trip to Belleville, another depot, on Friday with a program that evening at the Tri-County Fairgrounds and a field trip to Owenyo and Keeler on Sunday, the last day of the convention.

"We're not here to start a museum – this county has a lot of museums – we're here to help out Laws and the Carson and Colorado guys with fundraisers or anything else we can, and to just have a good time.

New textile building going up at Laws Railroad Museum

Laws combines materials from historic homes to build new display

2-3-2009

Special to The Inyo Register

Volunteers at Laws Railroad Museum have almost completed the renovation of this old Big Pine School District building which will hold a textile display. Photo submitted

Laws Museum was able to obtain a building from the Big Pine School District that is now being creatively turned into a new Textile Building with three separate display rooms.

Included in the displays will be a seamstress' workshop room, ladies' clothing in an early 20th century setting and a separate old-time beauty shop. In 2006 a grant was given to the museum to begin work on this building and the new stamp mill display. Both buildings are expected to open to the public later this year.

After considerable creative planning, the rehabilitation work on the old building began several months ago. Many volunteers have contributed to the several phases of the conversion.

Throughout the construction the exterior has been amazingly transformed from a plain, modest-looking utility structure into an old-fashioned western building with all the trimmings.

Of special interest is the front door. The entrance to the building came from the Judge Robinson house that was built on Mumy Lane in Bishop in 1916. In fact, the entire structure was a Sears Roebuck kit house. Everything, including the fireplaces, were shipped to Bishop via narrow gauge railroad. The door had been stored in a boxcar at the museum for 20 years. It underwent extensive renovation before being hung.

A picture of the Robinson home may be seen in the picture room off the reception area at the museum.

Also of interest are the windows in the new rooms of the Textile Building. These beautiful old-time windows are also from the Robinson house. This is the third museum building to use them. They were also installed in the Bottle House and the Medical Building (doctor, dentist, optician, pharmacy and barber shop displays).

The pillars and small corbels on the porch are from the old Butler house that was built in the 1890s on North Main Street in Bishop. It was torn down in 1967. (The location is now the entrance to the J Diamond Mobile Ranch.)

The lumber was brought to Laws Museum and has been used for building projects over the years. A picture of the house is also in the picture room. The large corbels on top of the porch are from the old two-story Bishop City Hall that was built in the 1890s and torn down in the 1950s.

Commerce Along El Camino Sierra

Today, commerce moves along El Camino Sierra to destinations throughout the northern and western parts of the United States. Large semi-trucks are a fairly common sight along this most scenic ribbon of blacktop.

Many years ago, dirt roads, remoteness and lack of services made moving goods and supplies by truck and auto a difficult task. But a fairly efficient transportation system arrived in Eastern California towards the end of the 19th century, and the movement of products and people became much easier.

The silver boom was well under way on the Comstock of Northern Nevada in the 1870s. The Virginia and Truckee (V&T) Railroad serviced Virginia City, Gold Hill, Carson City and eventually Reno during this time. At the peak of the great silver boom, the V&T operated 30 to 45 trains a day between Carson City and Virginia City. The railroad boasted of 22 locomotives and 361 freight cars, and was turning a profit of over $100,000 a month in 1870s dollars.

Spurred by the profits being made from its involvement in mining towns, the V&T executives made a decision in 1880 to build a new railroad, south past Hawthorne, Nevada, into California over Montgomery Pass and down through the Owens Valley. To save expense, it would be a "narrow gauge" railroad, with tracks only thirty-six inches apart compared to a standard gauge's fifty-six inch width. The new line was built to take advantage of the mining boom happening at the time in Bodie as well as smaller strikes at Candelaria, Nevada and Bend City and San Carlos in the Owens Valley.

The new line was named the Carson & Colorado Railroad (CCRR) though it was never the intention to run the railroad as far as the state of Colorado. Rather, it was planned to someday run to the mines near the Colorado River in Nevada and Arizona.

The line extended as far as Candelaria by 1882 and all the way to Keeler (300 miles) on the shores of Owens Lake by July of 1883. The "Slim Princess," as it was called, brought supplies into Eastern California and hauled goods, people and ore out.

The narrow-gauge railroad didn't turn the profits its investors had hoped for. The mining activity in the area fluctuated wildly, and though people did use the rail line for travel to and from the Owens Valley, it was not easy to do so. The tracks for the Carson & Colorado ran along the east side of the Owens Valley, while the major towns were all on the west.

As the fortunes of the V&T waned, it sold its CCRR line to the Southern Pacific Railroad (SP). Good fortune fell right in the SP's lap when in the very early 1900s, gold and silver were discovered in Goldfield and Tonopah, Nevada. The strikes were promising and the SP elected to replace the narrow gauge with a standard gauge from Carson City to Mina, Nevada, where it connected to the new Tonopah Railroad. The existing line into the Owens Valley was left a narrow gauge.

In 1910, the Southern Pacific built a standard gauge line into the Owens Valley from southern California, primarily to support the construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct. The new standard gauge met the narrow gauge at Owenyo (the former Quaker Colony town).

Over the next five decades, the use of the Carson & Colorado continued to decline. In the 1940s, the line from Laws (near Bishop) north was torn out. The narrow gauge was left operating only between Laws and Owenyo, and not very often.

In late spring of 1954, MGM Studios announced they would be filming a new movie on location in the Lone Pine area. The movie was titled *Bad Day at Black Rock* and starred Spencer Tracy, Anne Francis, Robert Wagner, Lee Marvin and Walter Brennan. MGM would build a faux town

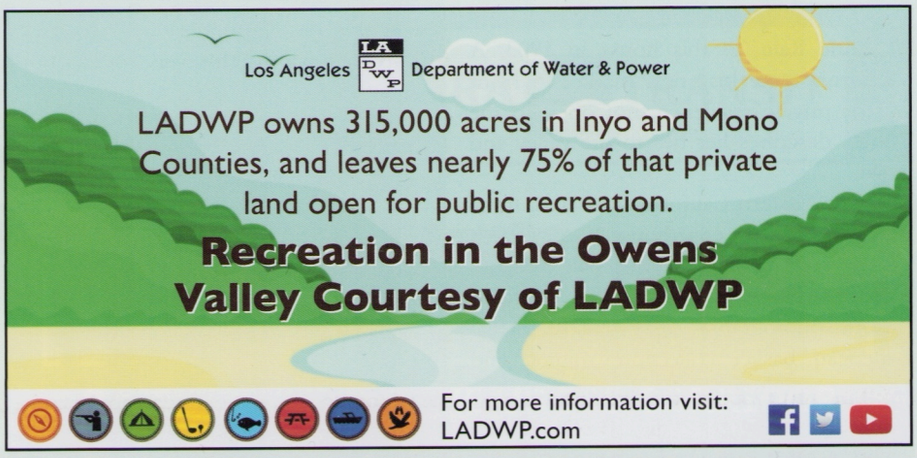
near the old Lone Pine railroad depot for the movie. The studio also worked out a deal with the Southern Pacific Railroad to bring one of its super modern Streamliner passenger trains up from L.A. to be used in the movie.

MGM wanted two diesel locomotives and five modern passenger cars for the scene, and it was reported SP charged MGM $5,500 and the cost of 265 round-trip passenger tickets for use of the trains.

Due to the weight of the train and the fact that the tracks in the Lone Pine area were constructed for smaller and lighter freight trains, there was a fair amount of concern whether the train could make it up to Lone Pine safely. Bridges were approached with the lighter passenger cars first and the heavier engines trailing, in case a bridge collapsed. The 200-mile trip from southern California to Lone Pine took twelve hours as the train never traveled faster than 25 miles an hour.

The last train operated in the Owens Valley in 1960. Local school children and residents were invited to ride the last trip of this vestige of Eastern California history. But residents weren't about to let this piece of their heritage just fade away. Community members in Independence obtained one of the old CCRR steam locomotives for display at the County park and folks in Bishop obtained another of the historic iron horses for display and public enjoyment at Laws Railroad Museum.

Independence's Engine #18 has recently been restored to working condition by a dedicated group of volunteers. As of early 2017, this treasured piece of Eastern California history has been moved to a new location at the Eastern California Museum for display, and for the enjoyment for all those traveling and dreaming of days of yesteryear that have taken place...along El Camino Sierra.



The Laws Railroad Museum and Historic Site includes static displays of a train consisting of an oil-fired steam engine Steam locomotive and several freight cars from the narrow gauge Southern Pacific Railroad. The museum's display explains that the railroad was relied on by many Eastern Sierra communities before modern roads were built during the 1950s and 1960s.
A station agent's home is located south of the railroad station. Docents portray the station agent on most days, helping visitors understand the period culture.
The Museum includes several historic buildings moved to the museum site from downtown Bishop. There is a church and school house. There is a wooden Western Electric 11-type telephone booth. A vehicle on display was a 1949 ambulance, which was later painted black, stripped of emergency lighting, and used as a hearse. Medical implements from a historic local doctor's office are on display.

SLIM PRINCESS

These Rails Run Backward In Time

The Laws Railroad Museum and Historical Exhibit, Laws, Calif., just four and one-half miles northeast of Bishop, Calif., is more than just a collection of railroaders' Californiana. This museum is "End-o'-Track" for probably the most successful narrow gauge railroad ever to operate on the North American Continent.

Known as "The Keeler Branch" and nicknamed the Slim Princess, the first section of the railroad was completed from Mound House to Candaleria, Nev., in 1882. Step by step, the narrow gauge line grew, through Basalt, Summit, Queen, Benton, Hammil, Piute to Laws, then on to Zurich, Akvord, Tibbets, Kearsarge, Owenyo and Keeler.

The railway, to serve the remote mining and early agricultural communities of the Owens Valley for almost eight decades, started operations as the Carson & Colorado, but was acquired by the Southern Pacific Railway Co. in 1912.

Through the 1920's, the narrow gauge railroad was in use by the communities it served, but by 1932, passenger service was abandoned, and diminishing revenue, "declining and unpredictable use of the line," plus "expensive and time consuming transfer of shipments between narrow gauge and standard gauge cars," brought about the demise of "The Slim Princess."

April 30, 1960, was the very last day that Locomotive No. 9, a Baldwin 10-wheeler built in 1909, drawing a string of freight cars, was to make the run between Laws and Keeler, Calif.

The Southern Pacific transferred the Laws station building, Locomotive No. 9 and a selection of equipment and railroad memorabilia, to the City of Bishop and Inyo County.

In 1965, the city and county negotiated an agreement with the Bishop Museum and Historical Society to take over the Laws site as a museum – which was formally opened to the public on April 1, 1966, 83 years from the day the first scheduled train arrived in Laws from the north.

During its history, the railroad hauled equipment and supplies for construction of the Owens Valley aqueduct, which still serves the Los Angeles Metropolitan Water District, and delivered the U. S. Mail and Wells Fargo Express shipments.

Visitors to the Laws Railroad Museum and Historical Site enter a reception center in the "Sweetwater Building," so named when it was part of a set for the Paramount film, "Nevada Smith." Inside the center are displays of early day mining tools, assayer balances, Indian artifacts, Gay 90's office equipment, firearms, and items found in a country general store.

Next on the museum visitor's tour is the depot, built in 1883 for the arrival of the Carson & Colorado narrow gauge trains. The agent's office, in the depot, doubles as an exhibit and as the museum's business office.

Waiting room, baggage room and freight room are as they were when they were part of a thriving railway transportation system.

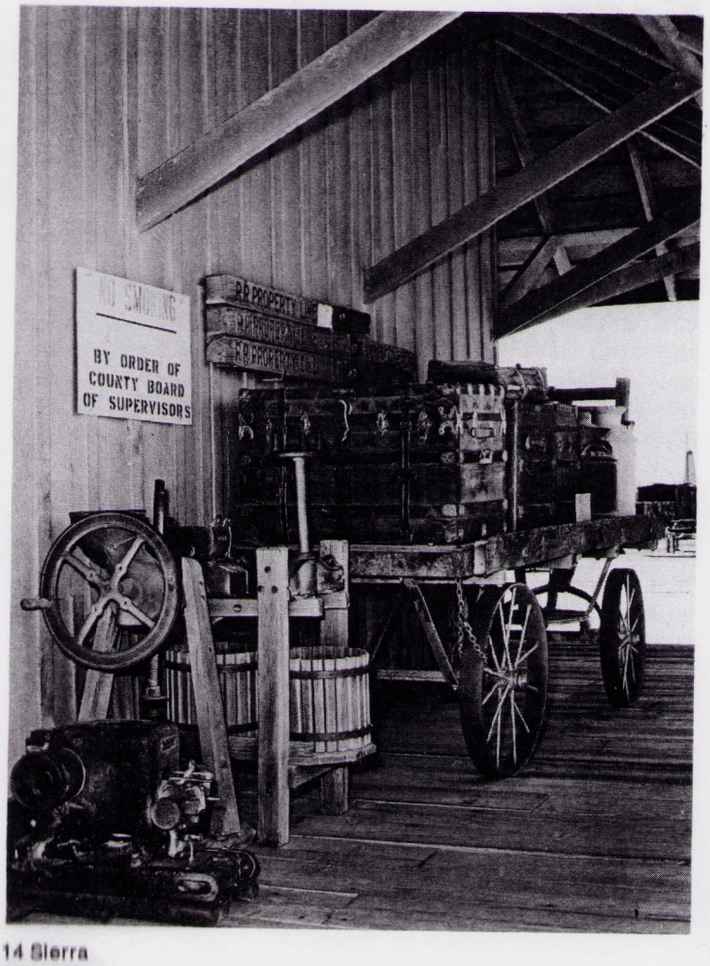
The train on display is made up of Locomotive No. 9 and a string of cars that were in use when the railroad was abandoned by the Southern Pacific.

The station agent's house, also built in 1883, contains rooms that have been restored and refurnished in the style of the railroad's heyday period.

The turntable on the museum grounds was built in 1883, too, and was in use up to the last run of April 30, 1960.

For the visitor to the Owens Valley of the Sierra, the Laws Railroad Museum and Historical Site is a look into California's past, to the days when men were railroad men, and their first lady was "The Slim Princess." •

No. 9 waits at "End-o'-Track" for another run that will never be made . . .



Cider press, one-lung gasoline engine, trunks and milk cans await the train . . .

The Narrow Gauge Railroad of Owens Valley

by Beverly Webster

Photos by Bill Webster

April 29, 1960 marked the end of a railroad saga spanning eighty years when the "Slim Princess," the last operating narrow gauge train west of the Rockies, made its final run between Keeler and Laws in the Owens Valley.

Then owned by Southern Pacific, this railroad had changed names several times, helped to build fortunes for a few farsighted, enterprising, some not-too-scrupulous, individuals, brought a transportation system and new industry to the Owens Valley, and become a significant part of the Valley's history. I cannot say whether you could set your watch by this little train, but it was a familiar sight puffing along the eastern side of Owens Valley at the foot of the White and Inyo mountains. From 1880 to 1960 it hauled freight, and until 1932 it also provided passenger service to the people of the Owens Valley who wanted to travel to San Francisco, Los Angeles, and more faraway places across the country.

It all started when the line was incorporated as the Carson and Colorado Railroad in 1880. The man considered by historians to be the brain behind the new railroad was William Sharon, whose character history books do not treat kindly. Most chroniclers of that period make it clear that Sharon's financial manipulations crossed the boundaries of propriety even for those years. He was president of the Virginia City branch of the Bank of California, California's oldest bank. Evidence is strong that Sharon, working with William Ralston of the bank's headquarters in San Francisco, had questionable dealings during the Comstock bonanza that resulted in losses to many San Francisco investors who had bought their worthless stock. After disclosure of the stock schemes, Ralston resigned his bank post.

Although it has never been determined that he committed suicide, it seems more than coincidence that Ralston, a known strong swimmer, drowned while bathing in one of his favorite haunts near the Golden Gate on the day of his resignation. Regardless of his unorthodox business deals, Sharon somehow escaped blame at that time and managed to inherit a substantial amount of Ralston's property, including the Palace Hotel in San Francisco.

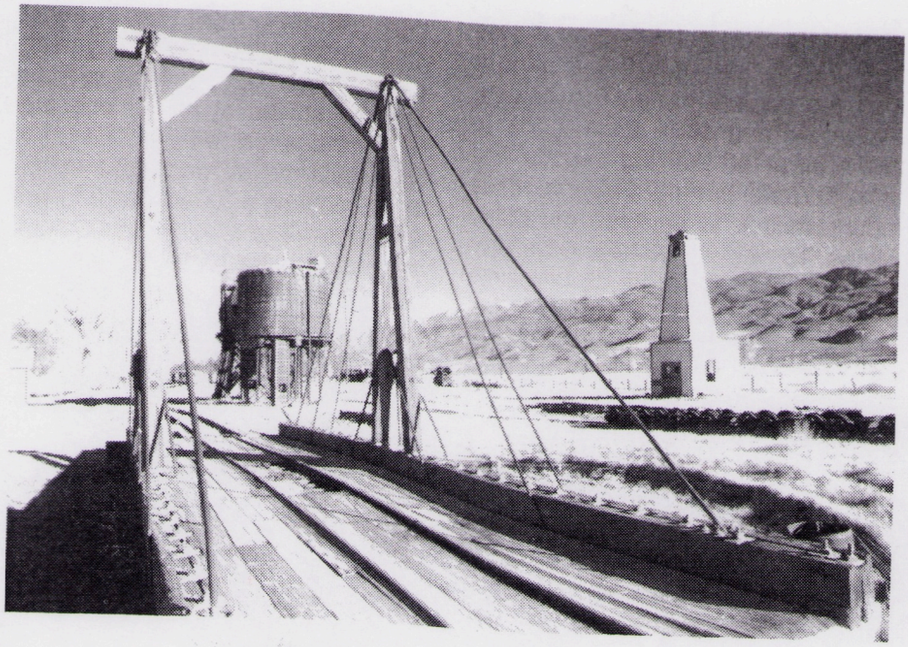
Sharon had played a significant role in development of the highly lucrative Virginia and Truckee Railroad. As he saw his business ventures tied to the fortunes of the Comstock Lode fading, however, he turned to mining possibilities further south in Nevada and to another railroad. After Ralston's demise another major figure in post-goldrush San Francisco, D. Ogden Mills, took over his duties as president of the Bank of California. Sharon proposed to Mills the building of a narrow gauge railroad continuing south from the terminus of the Virginia and Truckee Railroad at Mound House, Nevada, to tap into the mines being developed in southwestern Nevada.

Sharon's most convincing arguments to Mills for the railroad were that it would be inexpensive to build and maintain and it would be a money maker. It would be narrow gauge and utilitarian, and, used largely to carry freight, the railroad would have no need for ornate rolling stock such as that on the Virginia and Truckee. Sharon also saw that using cheap Chinese labor to build it would be another way to save money. Convincing Mills that this small railroad would be a sure source of financial profit from the southern mines, Sharon succeeded in getting his approval to start construction.

At that time Mound House, ten miles east of Carson City, was an important railroad center on the Virginia and Truckee Railroad, the short line that served the silver mines in the Comstock Lode. The Carson and Colorado Railroad would continue south from Mound House on the Carson River and travel along Nevada's western border to Ft. Mojave on the Colorado River in Southern Nevada. The two rivers provided the railroad's name.

Ground breaking and laying of the first rails took place at Mound House on May 31, 1880. A year later tracks had been laid as far as Hawthorne, a distance of one hundred miles. During that summer of 1881, however, the proposed route to Nevada's western mines was changed when in addition to the Cerro Gordo Mine near Owens Lake more rich lodes were rumored to be locked in California's Eastern Sierra Nevada. The Carson and Colorado would go into Califonria and tap the business created by these mines.

The revised course introduced new challenges to the builders as they had to abandon original plans for level alignment and devise strategies to cross Mt. Montgomery Pass from



Turntable, water tank, and pump house at Laws Railroad Museum, Laws, CA. Pump house and turntable are from original town of Laws.

Engine #18 is displayed in a small park in Independence, CA. Engine #18 is a Baldwin 10-wheel, 4-6-0 locomotive, built in 1911 originally for Nevada-California-Oregon Railroad.

Depot at Laws Railroad Museum, Laws, CA

Nevada to California. The pass was over 7,000 feet, 2,700 feet higher than the original route. The eastern ascent with grades from 2.3% to 2.77% required building trestles and considerable cutting through rocky mountainsides to navigate the steep climbs. To help negotiate the western descent into California construction crews bored a 247-foot tunnel through the rocky mountainside just west of Mt. Montgomery station. Building the railroad over this mountainous stretch took a year, and the first train arrived at Benton in California in January, 1883. Travelling this section of the Carson and Colorado continued to pose problems throughout the railroad's life as extra engines had to be added to pull the loads over the summit, and trains often became victims of the snow's fierce force over the pass.

Since the railroad would operate in California in addition to Nevada, new incorporation papers had to be filed. Thus in 1882 the narrow gauge line became the Carson and Colorado Railroad Company, Second Division, for the section operating in Nevada and the Carson and Colorado Railroad Company, Third Division, for that operating in California.

By March, 1883 tracks had been laid as far as Laws, and regular train service in that town started on April 1. As rail construction continued down Owens Valley, however, residents became concerned since their towns were being bypassed. The population centers had grown on the west side of the Valley while the railroad travelled down the east side closer to the mines, and the townspeople had to travel considerable distances to use the train. Eventually, horse-drawn stages from the established communities met the trains, thus alleviating the problem to some extent. In 1911 and 1912 there were serious prospects that an electric railway would connect Bishop and Laws, but this project never materialized.

The narrow gauge reached Keeler, then called Hawley, on the north shore of Owens Lake in July, 1883, and at this time Mr. Mills decided to take a look at the railroad he was building. After a tortuous trip from San Francisco, most of it in the hot, lone, dusty, uncomfortable, utilitarian passenger car of the narrow gauge line, he arrived at Keeler and made his famous comment: "Either we have built the railroad three hundred miles too long or three hundred years too soon." The Carson and Colorado Railroad, Third Division, therefore, ended permanently at Keeler.

Despite Mr. Mills' feelings about the Carson and Colorado, the coming of the railroad did bring benefits to Owens Valley. It ended the isolation of the Valley residents and their dependence on slow, very limited horse-drawn vehicles. They had a north-south rail connection and most importantly a link through Nevada to the nation's main east-west line. Availability of a railroad encouraged mining exploration in the Eastern Sierra, and, as is always the case in California, speculators in land development prospered.

Many of the stations along the new railroad line soon became towns, of course some more important than others. As a result of the railroad, Laws became a thriving distribution center for the Valley, transporting mining supplies, ore of various kinds, cattle, farming equipment, agricultural products, and passengers, mostly miners. Laws, then called Bishop Creek, was not the first settlement in that area, however. A small community called Owensville had flourished in the 1860s, but by the time the railroad came through all trace of a town was gone. In about the same location before Owensville the first cabin in the Owens Valley had been built in 1861 — "at the big bend of the Owens River."

The Carson and Colorado's daily mixed train became known as the Slim Princess. The mixture included a mail and baggage car, a passenger car, a variety of freight cars, and a caboose. A trip from one end of the line, Mound House to Keeler, took two days, with an overnight stop at Candelaria, Nevada.

In 1890 one of the more famous shipments of the Carson and Colorado from the Owens Valley was two hundred cars of marble, from the Inyo Marble Works just north of Keeler, destined for San Francisco. The marble was to be used in construction of the ornate D.O. Mills Building that today remains a landmark in that city's Financial District and a survivor of the 1906 and 1989 earthquakes.

Business continued to be good on the narrow gauge until the early 1890s when mining traffic in Nevada declined and the nation's economy took a downturn. Expecting to improve the railroad's financial picture, the owners in 1892 again reorganized to incorporate the separate divisions into one company called the Carson and Colorado Railway Company.

Due to a recasting of players in this country's railroad-building epoch, the Carson and Colorado underwent a major change in the year 1900. Early that year Collis P. Huntington, head of Southern Pacific and last of the Big Four responsible for building the transcontinental railroad, purchased the Carson and Colorado for $2,750,000 from the Mills estate. Huntington, unfortunately, died later that year and was not to know what an opportune purchase he had made for his company.

The new leader of Southern Pacific, Edward Henry Harriman, was a railroad tycoon from New York and father of Averell Harriman, one of America's more famous statesmen of the twentieth century. When he took over Southern Pacific, E.H. Harriman already controlled Union Pacific Railroad and for a few years enjoyed the power that the joining of these two railroads brought.

Harriman saw the Carson and Colorado as instrumental in the expansion of his railroad empire throughout the West, mainly using it to connect Reno with Southern California. A silver boom in Tonopah, Nevada, and a gold rush in Goldfield, Nevada, however, pushed the newly acquired narrow gauge line into a prime position and diverted Harriman from his original plans. For a few years the Carson and Colorado had a monopoly on shipping mining equipment and supplies into the new Nevada mines along with materials and merchan-

dise for the towns that sprang up. And from the mines it brought out the silver and gold ore to be refined. These boom times for the railroad lasted about ten years.

To garner maximum profits from the new Nevada bonanzas, Mr. Harriman saw the need to streamline transporting freight from the narrow gauge Carson and Colorado to the main Southern Pacific line at Reno. The narrow gauge picked up the ore at Tonopah Junction, where it had been brought from the mines by mule trains, and carried it to Mound House. There it again had to be transferred, this time to the Virginia and Truckee standard gauge cars, one more slow, cumbersome, and expensive operation. Because of the transferring between narrow and standard gauge and reliance on the short-line Virginia and Truckee, traffic moved slowly and unloaded cars caused major congestion at transfer points. In 1904 the Carson and Colorado became standard gauge from Tonopah Junction to Mound House, which eased the situation somewhat, but Harriman still had to rely on the Virginia and Truckee as connector.

His solution was the Hazen Cut-Off, a 28-mile standard gauge line from Hazen, some forty miles east of Reno, connecting with the Carson and Colorado at Churchill. It would bypass Mound House and eliminate the Virginia and Truckee altogether.

In the meantime the narrow gauge Tonopah Railroad had been built from Tonopah to connect with the Carson and Colorado. This short line soon became standard gauge, and by 1905 shipment of ore from the mines to the main Southern Pacific line could be made all on standard gauge. Mina became an important railhead with the standard gauge cars continuing on the Tonopah Railroad to the Nevada mines and traffic going west into California transferring to the Carson and Colorado's narrow gauge cars. A third rail had been added to the nine-mile Mina to Tonopah Junction segment to accommodate the narrow gauge train.

The railroad that now included the Hazen Cut-Off became in 1905 the Nevada and California Railway, which it remained until 1912 when it took the Southern Pacific name.

One of Harriman's promises when he took over Southern Pacific had been to connect the narrow gauge Carson and Colorado with the main Southern Pacific line to Los Angeles. Not until the beginning of construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct did work on this link finally start. This massive project that would ultimately bring water of the Sierra to parched Los Angeles needed a railroad to transport equipment and supplies to the Owens Valley, and the powers behind the undertaking pressured Southern Pacific to build a rail line.

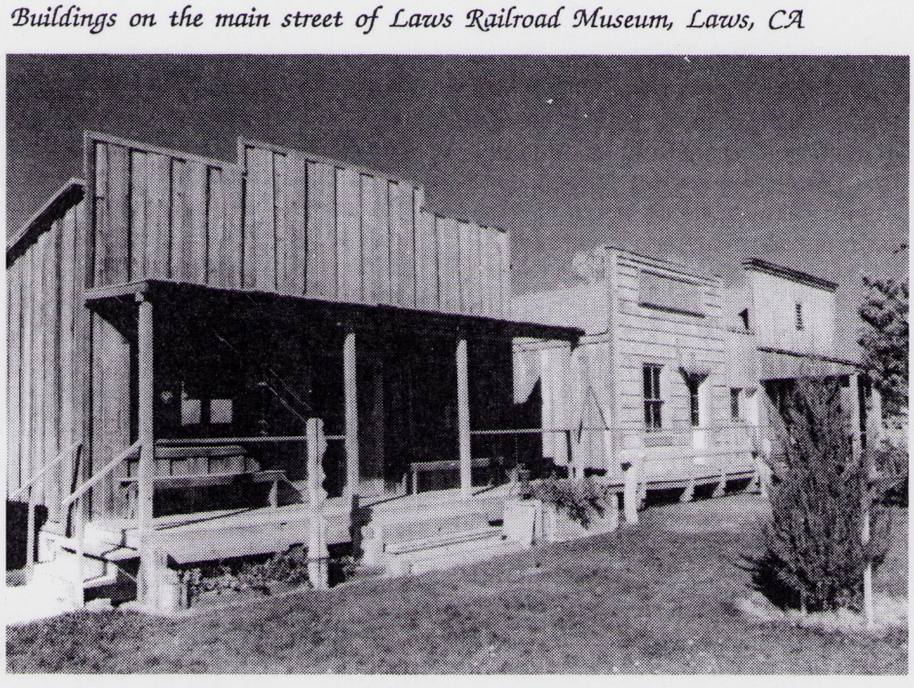
In May of 1908, then, work finally began at Mojave on a standard gauge railroad north to connect with the narrow gauge Nevada and California Railway. This route, too, was not without its share of construction problems. Cutting east to avoid Red Rock Canyon, the tracks had to cross El Paso Summit near the community of Searles. Here Southern Pacific constructed a 4,340-foot tunnel, a project that took the better part of a year. In October, 1910 the 143-mile Southern Pacific branch known as "The Jawbone" connected with the narrow gauge Nevada and California Railway at Owenyo, near Lone Pine, finally offering people of the Owens Valley rail transportation to Los Angeles.

As the link between the two lines, Owenyo became an important passenger terminal. It was a one-day trip from Los Angeles to Owenyo where through passengers stayed overnight to catch a train the next day. Then for several years during the 1920s an overnight sleeper ran from Los Angeles to Owenyo, thus avoiding the overnight stopover at Owenyo. There was service six days a week from Owenyo to Laws and three days a week from Laws to Mina, Nevada, where passengers transferred to the standard gauge train to continue to the main line at Hazen.

In his monograph "The Slim Princess" John Hungerford states that 1924-29 was the heydey of the narrow gauge in Owens Valley. "It was not uncommon for 1,000-1,800 carloads of sheep and 400-500 carloads of cattle to be shipped out in a season."

It would seem that the transportation system of the Eastern Sierra was complete with rail service both north and south and connections with the transcontinental lines. Nothing is static, however, and as California's highway system improved Owens Valley

Buildings on the main street of Laws Railroad Museum, Laws, CA



became part of that network, and automobiles and trucks had easy access to the Eastern Sierra. As had been the case with railroads in so many other parts of the country, this railroad slowly lost out to trucks and cars as its freight and passenger service gradually declined. Passengers became so scarce on the Mina to Laws run, historical accounts say that during summer the train often stopped at Walker Lake for the crew to swim when there were no riders to enforce schedules. Passenger service in the Owens Valley was finally discontinued in 1932.

1932 to 1938 saw the closing of sections of the railroad in Nevada, and in 1943 the line from Benton to Laws was shut down. By 1950 the only operating service of the narrow gauge railroad was the 71-mile segment between Laws and Keeler, with mining products continuing to be its main freight. Southern Pacific finally received approval to abandon this last section in 1960, and although the final run from Keeler to Laws was April 29, 1960 the Laws-Keeler branch of the Southern Pacific officially terminated on April 30.

During their lifetimes the Carson and Colorado Railroad, Carson and Colorado Railway Company, Nevada and California Railway, and ultimately Southern Pacific Railroad operated a variety of equipment as they converted from wood to coal and finally to diesel. To keep costs down, the Carson and Colorado usually used equipment inherited from other railroads, and Southern Pacific brought in more equipment from its other narrow gauge lines after it took over. Three Baldwin steam engines, however, did yeoman service for years — SP Numbers 8, 9, and 18. In 1954 a narrow gauge General Electric 450-horsepower diesel replaces the steam engines, but Number 9 was kept for backup. Number 8 is now on exhibit in Carson City, and Number 18 is in Independence.

After closing down the Laws-Keeler branch Southern Pacific donated to the City of Bishop and Inyo County Locomotive Number 9, some box cars, a caboose, the turntable, the water tank, and a piece of track, the nucleus for today's railroad museum. Building on what Southern Pacific had left and the remains of a set for a Steve McQueen movie made soon after the railroad's departure, members of the Bishop Museum and Historical Society determined to keep Laws a going operation. On April 1, 1966, exactly eighty-three years from the date the first train came through Laws, they dedicated the museum.

Buildings from other parts of Inyo and Mono counties have been brought in to complete the set, all done by volunteer labor. The buildings are filled with period furniture and artifacts of the turn of the century when Laws was a vital railroad town. The depot with its baggage room, passenger waiting room, and the station master's workroom gives a feeling that soon the train will be coming.

The town of Laws is named fittingly for one of the Carson and Colorado's old-timers. Robert Laws was superintendent of the construction crew when building of the railroad began at Mound House in 1880. A former Central Pacific roadmaster, he had a long career with the Carson and Colorado, and later when Southern Pacific took over he was kept on as Superintendent of the railroad.

Although the narrow gauge's roadbed sans rails can be seen most of the way down the Owens Valley, most of the towns that were created by the railroad have disappeared. At Owenyo and Kearsage weeds and sagebrush have taken over. The depot still stands in Keeler, although it has been converted to living quarters. Across the street from the Keeler depot is a plaque announcing that this was the "end of the line" for the Carson and Colorado Railroad. Except to the trained eye of an experienced railroad detective, signs that this was where the steam shop for the rail line was located with all the attendant activity are gone.

As the narrow gauge flourished for a time and has now vanished, the people of power whose dreams were tied to the railroad have also disappeared from the scene. The men who bought and sold legislators like shoes and whose voices caused people to tremble are silenced — Huntington, Harriman, Mills, Sharon, Ralston. Except for Huntington, they are known to few today, and evidence of their enterprise in western Nevada and Owens Valley is mostly gone.

At Laws, however, some of the memory of the Slim Princess has been preserved. Today over 20,000 people from various parts of the world visit the reconstructed railroad town. Here they can climb aboard the old steam engine, ring its bell, and become engineer on Engine Number 9. ❊

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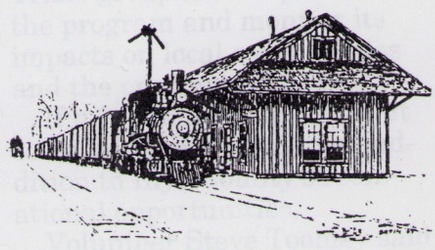


Slim Princess and steam

Whistle harkens back to the Inyo County of old

By Jon Klusmire

The railroad came to Inyo County in the 1870s, and for the next 80 years locomotives, passenger cars, train stations, freight cars and the men who made the trains run were an important part of the economic life of the Owens Valley. The railroad era slowly ground to a halt in the 1950s and 1960s, as first passenger service was discontinued, and then freight service, and finally, the tracks were pulled up, the rail bed blocked off and several of the distinctive railroad stations were either shuttered, torn down or sold to private individuals.

The Laws Railroad Museum keeps the region's railroad legacy alive, with its large train station open to the public and several locomotives and train cars on display.

Independence also boasts a colorful reminder of the area's railroading history. The Slim Princess Locomotive No. 18 has resided in Dehy Park since the early 1960s. For that entire time, the engine has been a silent, static exhibit, but that all changed earlier this year, thanks to the efforts of a dedicated group of volunteer train buffs and the support of stream engine enthusiasts from across the state and the West.

In August, those volunteers clamored over the restored steam engine and brought her back to life.

They watched as the orange flames licked the fire box door, generating about 700 degrees of heat, which was hot enough to make enough steam to send an unmistakable train whistle through Dehy Park.

With that sound, Carson and Colorado Steam Engine Number 18, the Slim Princess, came back to life after being dormant since 1954 and, more recently, undergoing five years of intense rebuilding that finally led to firing the historic engine for a full day.

The all-volunteer crew of locomotive mechanics, "steam fanatics" and enthusiastic helpers took a moment to enjoy the sound of the steam whistle coming out of the Slim Princess. The day-long engine test culminating in a blast of steam represented a "great big step forward" on the road to getting No. 18 completely restored as a fully functioning, run-down-the-tracks steam locomotive.

Independence's Dehy Park has been the locomotive's home since local residents convinced Southern Pacific to donate the locomotive to Inyo County after the demise of the Southern Pacific Railroad in the Owens Valley. The Slim Princess' last trip was on the back of semi when it was trucked to the park in the 1960s. The non-profit Carson and Colorado Railway Company was formed by local residents with the primary purpose of turning the 89,200 pounds of black steel and shiny brass into a living piece of Owens Valley railroading history.

As the crew began to gather, some were asked if they were confident the locomotive could be safely fired up. The response from Dave Mull was quick: "you bet, these guys do this for a living," he shouted while driving a huge forklift that would be used in the day's work.

Mull, an Independence resident and owner of Dave's Auto Parts in Lone Pine, is the president of the non-profit Carson & Colorado group and the chief organizer behind the ambitious effort. The team members that have methodically pulled apart and put back together the monster machine hails from all over the West.

Shown getting Engine 18's steam whistle ready to blow were volunteers Randy Bacbcock, on the locomotive, and Marty Westland, left, and Travis Wheeler. Charley Cross is in the cab.

Photo by Jon Klusmire

As the big boiler roared to hot life, there were plenty of smiles, but the grins did not get in the way of a quiet focus on the job at hand among the mechanics nursing the big engine back to life.

The Slim Princess' next trip will be to the grounds of the Eastern California Museum, where it will be placed in an engine house and run on up to 1,000 feet of track.

But there will be plenty more to do on the locomotive before it moves out of its temporary tent shelter in Dehy Park.

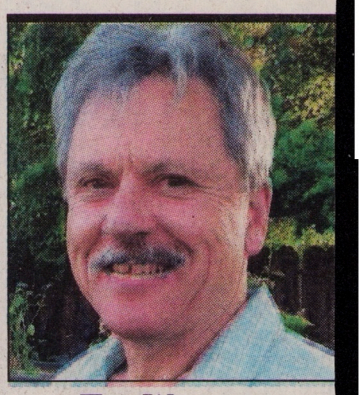
(Editor's note: For more information on the work of the non-profit Carson & Colorado Railway, and for ways to donate time, money or talent to the all-volunteer, donation-funded locomotive restoration effort, see the group's website: www.carsoncolorado.com.)

7-1-2017

The birth of Laws Railroad Museum

Main Street Laws and the General Merchandise building, looking west, circa 1910. To the left of the horse and buggy is the current location of the Museum Reception Center and Office.

Photos courtesy Laws Museum and Historic Site



TED WILLIAMS
COLUMNIST

On April 30, 1960, well-wishers piled onto railroad cars in Keeler, in southern Owens Valley to ride the rails one more time, to say goodbye to the historic Slim Princess on its final run north. Rumbling along the outdated narrow-gauge tracks, the near 80-year-old engine pulled its nostalgic payload to the train's eventual resting place at Laws Depot just north of Bishop. There, the oil-burning steam locomotive exhaled its hot vapor into the dry valley air one last time. When the celebration ended and everyone went home, the well-worn railroad depot quietly began its life of abandonment.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s Laws Depot, then called Bishop Station, was a busy terminal offering the only "modern" mode of transportation in and out of the Owens Valley. A hotel, restaurant, school, post office, grocery store and, of course, traveling patrons on the Carson & Colorado, provided jobs and economic stability. But as the 20th Century marched on, the town faded, eclipsed by the growing population of Bishop.

The end was near in 1959 when Southern Pacific considered shutting down the railway, reportedly the last of the narrow-gauge common carriers west of the Rockies. Even though S.P. expressed "great affection for the unique branch," the "declining and unpredictable use of the line... (meant it) can no longer be justified as an efficient operation." In April 1960 the rails went silent, and the Slim Princess ended its historic 77-year run.

Laws Depot was now quiet, kept company by a few nearby residents and the encroaching sagebrush, grass and scattered trees.

According to Howard Holland, the son of a pioneer family who brought movies and theater to the Owens Valley, Southern Pacific offered Inyo County the entire railway, "lock stock and barrel," from Keeler to Laws "but the supervisors didn't want any part of it." So S.P. began selling the baggage, freight, and passenger cars to local farmers for storage; and other rolling stock ended up as backyard art. The city of Bishop was offered Engine No. 9 but turned it down. The town of Independence reluctantly took on Engine No. 18.

In the year 1963 Engine No. 9 was sitting alone back in Keeler, rusting away, very close to being scrapped. But a handful of old-timers just couldn't stand the thought of losing this piece of history, so they stepped in to save not only Engine No. 9, but the entire historic Laws Depot.

In February 1964, those old-timers formed the Bishop Museum and Historical Society; this meant Southern Pacific finally found a home for the Slim Princess locomotive. S.P. painted it, and used a little diesel track car to push the historic engine back up the tracks to its new home at Laws Depot, followed by the remaining freight and passenger cars. Then, there was another gift.

Six months later, in July of '64, Inyo County accepted a gift deed from Southern Pacific - 11 acres of land under the depot, agent's house, oil and water tanks and the rare turntable. In another six months, January 1965, the city of Bishop and Inyo County negotiated an agreement with the new Historical Society, giving the group permission to create and operate a museum. But the effort to create a tangible museum had just begun.

With no dedicated building to administer the museum, story has it the depot itself was used as an office. Bookkeepers would bring in boxes of the day's paperwork, then at sundown they'd box it back up and take it home. But then Hollywood came to town, and that all changed.

In the summer of '65, Paramount Studios came to Laws to shoot a few scenes for the 1966 Steve McQueen movie "Nevada Smith." Film crews built props that included a replica two-story boarding house called Drovers Cottage across the street, a few corrals and two small buildings, one of which was west of the depot. When filming was complete, they left behind the hollow-shelled structures.

The pretend building west of the depot displayed the name Sweetwater, the hypothetical town McQueen visited in the movie. Its location, right next to the main road, made it perfect for a reception center. Museum volunteers went to work framing the interior and created a real building. They now had an office, as well as a period piece that would greet future visitors.

Lois Cleman and Louis Arcularius at a tree-planting ceremony at the Laws Museum sponsored by the Girl Scouts. These two were instrumental in making the museum a reality.

The Laws Railroad Museum was now a reality, opening to the public on April 1, 1966, exactly 83 years to the day from when the Carson & Colorado's Slim Princess first steamed into what was then called, Bishop Station. The doors were open but there wasn't much yet to look at.

Howard Holland recalls, "When they had the depot open to the public, they had artifacts all strung around the depot, what few they had; that was their only display room. The Agent's House was still closed up." So Louis Arcularius, son of local ranching pioneers, brought in old farm equipment and placed them around the grounds.

The Bishop Museum and Historical Society initially was very small; the first meeting had just six old-timers. But, according to Holland, between the year 1966-1968 "they started getting more members . . . and (it) became kinda more of a social club, they didn't have much (on the museum grounds) to show for it."

Holland describes the first few years of the Society: "They had annual meetings at the Masonic Temple with dinners and speakers - actually 'speaker' as Lois Cleman did all the speaking. She was a dignified, highly refined lady. She ran the whole meeting and it went on and on and on and on ... everybody sitting there moaning." Cleman, who operated the Inyo Store, Bishop's oldest building across from the theater, was the driving force for the museum; but eventually turned it over to Alice Booth, who became the museum administrator.

Laws Museum grew very slowly at first, starting with museum members painstakingly restoring the Agents House with authentic period furnishings actually used by the early pioneers. From the mid-'60s to the early-'70s, members and volunteers had occasional "work parties" to clear the grounds, trying to stay ahead of the brush and weeds.

Then the buildings began to arrive.

Holland recalls: "The first historic buildings that were placed on the grounds were the old Laws post office (and) the postmistress' house and (it) went from there."

By the mid-1970s people began donating artifacts and whole buildings: the early Laws mercantile store was moved to the property, an entire circa 1900 ranch home was moved in and filled with period furnishings and the original 1909 North Inyo School found a home there as well.

The historic buildings began filling up with the actual tools-of-the-trade used by pioneer tradesmen: doctors, barbers, dentists, newspaper printers, saloon keepers, homemakers, farmers, cowboys, blacksmiths, miners and more. And not all the displays were static; eventually there was a fully functioning stamp mill, a fully restored self-propelled brill car that today carries tourist as it did years ago in Death Valley. And, of course, there is the Slim Princess steam locomotive, complete with box cars, passenger cars, and the rare hand-operated locomotive turntable.

Laws Railroad Museum became California Historical Landmark No. 953 and is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. People from around the world come to see firsthand what turn-of-the-century life was really like in the Eastern Sierra's Owens Valley.

The Laws Railroad Museum and Historic Site was the dream of a handful of people and must have exceeded their expectations. Local volunteers have donated countless hours, contributing their time and skills for nearly 50 years creating one of most unique outdoor museums in the Western United States. It is jam-packed with indoor and outdoor displays. Just 4 miles north of Bishop on Highway 6, the Laws Railroad Museum will leave you feeling you've traveled back in time. The image you take home will be indelible.

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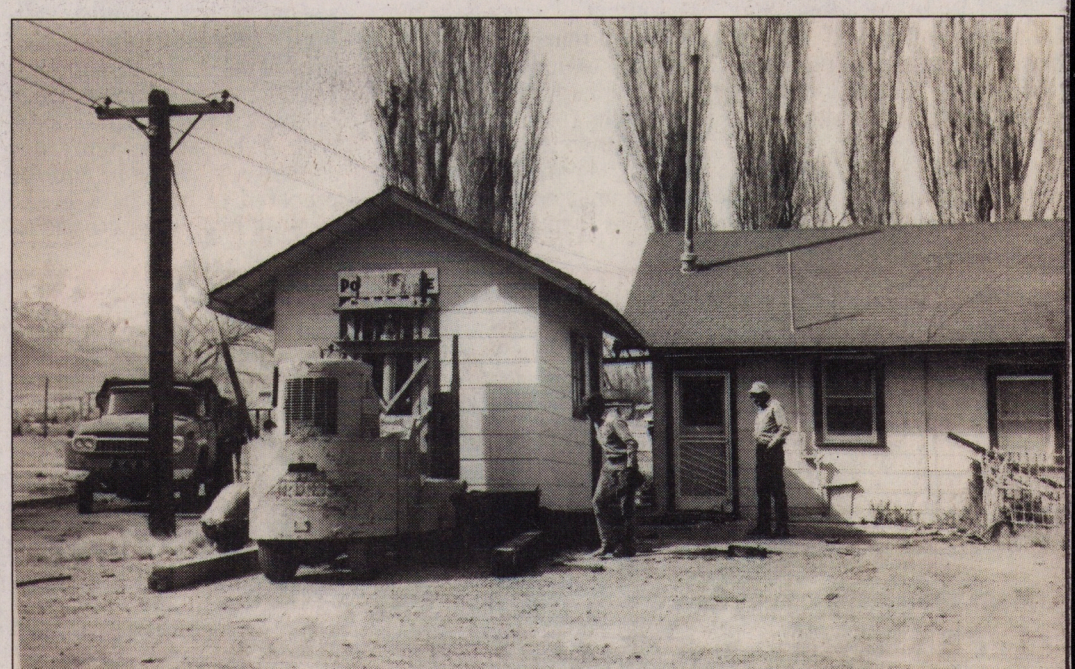
(With grandparents living in Bishop since the 1940s, Ted Williams moved to the area in 1970 and graduated from Bishop High in 1971. Over the last four decades, he has raised a family, worked in local radio and television, co-produced a documentary on the history of Laws Depot, and became Inyo County Third District Supervisor. Now working for the county as a real property appraiser, he has visited every remote corner of Inyo. His interests include weather, geology, fossils, four-wheeling, birding and hiking.)

"Sweet Water" was the imaginary town Steve McQueen visited in the 1966 movie "Nevada Smith" filmed at Laws. This set piece was turned into a real building and is now an office and reception center.



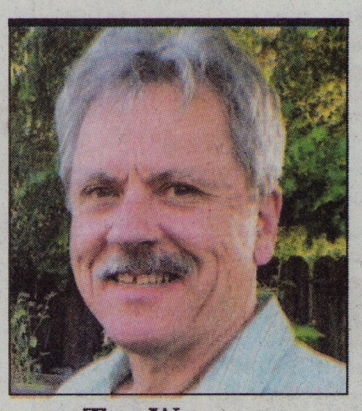
In the early 1970s, the old Laws Post Office became the first building to be moved to the museum grounds. The Post Office operated from 1887 until its last cancelled letter in 1963.

2018

The birth of Laws Railroad Museum

Main Street Laws and the General Merchandise building, looking west, circa 1910. To the left of the horse and buggy is the current location of the Museum Reception Center and Office.

Photos courtesy Laws Museum and Historic Site



TED WILLIAMS
COLUMNIST

(Editor's note: After discovering new information about the fate of the Slim Princess, and its relationship to the birth of the Laws Museum, we are presenting this revised story. In light of the museum's potential destruction from the Pleasant Fire, this is a reminder of how precious and vulnerable this unique indoor and outdoor museum is. If you haven't visited there recently, now is a good time to do so.)

On April 30, 1960, the Slim Princess made its final arrival at Laws Depot. The then 51-year-old Baldwin Engine No. 9 was unceremoniously pulled by a 50-ton diesel locomotive, while a smoky fire built in the smokestack tried to replicate a working steam engine, a salute to days gone by.

During the 1950s, people occasionally piled onto railroad cars in Keeler, in southern Owens Valley, and enjoyed the experience of rumbling along, riding-the-rails behind the Slim Princess, one the last of the narrow-gauge common carriers west of the Rockies. No one knows when for sure, but at some point there was a last-run of the Slim Princess as an oil-burning steam locomotive when it exhaled its hot vapor into the dry valley air for the last time.

The town of Laws and its depot have a rich history all their own. In the late 1800s and early 1900s Laws Depot, then called Bishop Station, was a busy terminal offering the only "modern" mode of transportation in and out of the Owens Valley. A hotel, restaurant, school, post office, grocery store and, of course, patrons on the Carson & Colorado, all provided jobs and economic stability. But, as the 20th Century marched on, the town faded, eclipsed by the growing population of Bishop.

The end was at hand in 1959 when Southern Pacific began the process of shutting down the railway. Even though S.P. expressed "great affection for the unique branch," the "declining and unpredictable use of the line... (meant it) can no longer be justified as an efficient operation." In April 1960 the rails went silent, and the Slim Princess ended its historic 77-year run.

Within the month, the rails between Laws and Keeler were being ripped up. In the book "Slim Rails Through the Sand," author George Turner wrote, "the ink was hardly dry on the last train orders of April 29, 1960, when the first rails were uprooted. Bulldozers were busy in Keeler that morning clearing a roadway for asphalt pavement."

According to Howard Holland, son of a pioneer family who brought movies and theater to the Owens Valley, Southern Pacific offered Inyo County the entire railway, "lock stock and barrel," from Keeler to Laws "but the Supervisors didn't want any part of it." So S.P. began selling the baggage, freight and passenger cars to local farmers for storage; and other rolling stock ended up as backyard curiosities.

The Laws Depot was now quiet, kept company by a few nearby residents and the encroaching sagebrush and grass.

The name "Slim Princess" was loosely used to represent the three engines that now found new homes. According to "Railroads of Nevada and Eastern California" – "Old No. 8 became an exhibition piece in Carson City, while No. 18 attained the same exalted status in Independence." (The local restoration group, Carson & Colorado Railway, has restored No. 18 to a fully functional steam locomotive and can be seen "exhaling its hot vapors" at special times at the Eastern California Museum in Independence and the Laws Railroad Museum north of Bishop.)

It's now 1963 and Engine No. 9 had been sitting alone at Laws for nearly three years. Vandalism was taking its toll on the remaining railroad cars and other structures. A handful of old-timers just couldn't stand the thought of losing this piece of history to neglect, so they stepped in to save not only engine No. 9, but the entire historic Laws Depot. In February 1964 those old-timers formed the Bishop Museum and Historical Society. The Slim Princess, and the depot itself, now had a chance for a secure future.

Six months later, in July of '64, Inyo County accepted a gift deed from Southern Pacific – 11 acres of land under the depot, agent's house, oil and water tanks and the rare turntable. In another six months, January 1965, the city of Bishop and county of Inyo negotiated an agreement with the new Historical Society, giving them permission to create and operate a museum. The effort to build a museum had begun.

With no dedicated building to administer the museum, story has it the depot itself was used as an office. Bookkeepers would bring in boxes of the day's paperwork, then at sundown they'd box it back up and take it home. But then Hollywood came to town, and that all changed.

Lois Cleman and Louis Arcularius at a tree-planting ceremony at the Laws Museum sponsored by the Girl Scouts. These two were instrumental in making the museum a reality.

In the summer of '65, Paramount Studios came to Laws to shoot a few scenes for the 1966 Steve McQueen movie "Nevada Smith." Film crews built props that included: a replica two-story boarding-house called Drovers Cottage across the street, a few corals and two small buildings, one of which was west of the depot. When filming was complete, they left behind the hollow-shelled structures.

The pretend building, west of the depot, displayed the name Sweetwater, the hypothetical town McQueen visited in the movie. Its location, right next to the main road, made it perfect for a reception center. Museum volunteers went to work framing the interior and created a real building. They now had an office, as well as a period piece that would greet future visitors.

The Laws Railroad Museum was now a reality, opening to the public on April 1, 1966, exactly 83 years to the day from when the Carson & Colorado's Slim Princess first steamed into what was then called, Bishop Station. Although the doors were open, there wasn't much yet to look at.

Howard Holland recalls: "When they had the depot open to the public, they had artifacts all strung around the depot, what few they had; that was their only display room. The Agent's House was still closed up." So Louis Arcularius, son of local ranching pioneers, brought in old farm equipment and placed them around the grounds.

The Bishop Museum and Historical Society initially was very small; the first meeting had just six old-timers. But, according to Holland, between the years 1966-1968 "they started getting more members . . . and (it) became kinda more of a social club, they didn't have much (on the museum grounds) to show for it."

Holland describes the first few years of the Society: "They had annual meetings at the Masonic Temple with dinners and speakers – actually 'speaker' as Lois Cleman did all the speaking. She was a dignified, highly refined lady. She ran the whole meeting and it went on and on and on and on ... everybody sitting there moaning." Cleman, who operated the Inyo Store, Bishop's oldest building across from the theater, was the driving force for the museum; but eventually turned it over to Alice Booth who became the museum administrator.

Laws Museum grew very slowly at first, starting with museum members painstakingly restoring the Agent's House with authentic period furnishings actually used by the early pioneers. From the mid-60s to the early-70s, members and volunteers had occasional "work parties" to clear the grounds, trying to stay ahead of the brush and weeds. Then buildings began to arrive.

Holland recalls: "The first historic buildings that were placed on the grounds were the old Laws post office (and) the postmistress' house, and (it) went from there."

By the mid-1970s people began donating artifacts and whole buildings: the early Laws mercantile store was moved to the property, an entire circa 1900 ranch home was moved in and filled with period furnishings, and the original 1909 North Inyo School found a home there as well.

The historic buildings began filing up with the actual tools of the trade used by pioneer tradesmen: doctors, barbers, dentists, newspaper printers, saloon keepers, homemakers, farmers, cowboys, blacksmiths, miners and more. And not all the displays were static; eventually there was a fully functioning stamp mill, a fully restored self-propelled Brill Car that today carries tourist as it did years ago in Death Valley. And of course there is the Slim Princess steam locomotive, complete with box cars, passenger cars, and the rare hand-operated locomotive turntable.

Laws Railroad Museum became California Historical Landmark No. 953 and is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. People from around the world come to see firsthand what turn-of-the-century life was really like in the Eastern Sierra's Owens Valley.

The Laws Railroad Museum was the dream of a handful of people and must have exceeded their expectations. Local volunteers have donated countless hours, contributing their time and skills for more than 50 years, creating one of most unique outdoor museums in the Western United States. It is jam-packed with indoor and outdoor displays. Just 4 miles north of Bishop on Highway 6, the Laws Railroad Museum will leave you feeling you've traveled back in time. The image you take home will be indelible.

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(With grandparents living in Bishop since the 1940s, Ted Williams moved to the area in 1970 and graduated from Bishop High in 1971. Raising a family here, he worked in local radio and television in the 1980s and '90s, co-produced a documentary on the history of Laws Depot and became Inyo County supervisor in 2003. Now retired, Ted enjoys weather, geology, fossils, birding, hiking, and of course writing.)

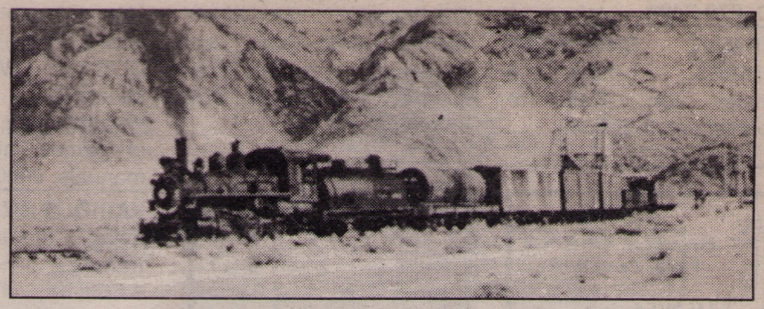
"Sweet Water" was the imaginary town Steve McQueen visited in the 1966 movie "Nevada Smith" filmed at Laws. This set piece was turned into a real building and is now an office and reception center.

In the early 1970s, the old Laws Post Office became the first building to be moved to the museum grounds. The Post Office operated from 1887 until its last cancelled letter in 1963.

WHAT WAS LAWS, REALLY?

It didn't set out to become a museum

12-4-1997



The little train chuffed along, its tender piled high with pinon to fire its engine up the mountain locked valley, along the green rural landscape, past the salty blue lake, and beside the Owens River. It carried important people, mining and farming equipment, household furnishings and merchandise, to return with the ores, marble, soda products, and agricultural produce of the Owens Valley.

Although sometimes annoyed by the delays, passengers really didn't expect the Slim Princess to keep a strict schedule. Stops for a brief swim in Owens Lake, some hunting for ducks along the marshy river banks or rabbits running through the sagebrush, whistling cows off the tracks, and picking up the occasional hitch hiker relieved the monotony of the long, dusty ride.

Coso, Swansea, Mock, San Carlos, Elna, Bend City, Chrysopolis, Beneme, Monola, Owenyo, Citrus (which became Kearsarge), Galena, Riverside (also called Graham City, which disappeared without a trace), Aberdeen, Zurich, Alvord, Black Canyon, Bigelow, Poleta, Owensville (on the east bank of the river, near Laws). As the train rolled along, dozens of sidings, spurs, water towers, and little stations came and went, some to become a part of the mining history of Inyo county, some to disappear forever, others to leave legends of glory and gore. Only Laws was to become a real town, although not the Laws you know and love today.

A busy distribution center for the valley, the staging area for all the mining supplies, ores, sheep, cattle, farming and mining equipment, and valley products, at first it was simply called "Station," but as 23 other stations appeared along the 365 mile line from Mound House, Nevada, to Keeler, it was named in honor of Robert Laws, popular superintendent of the construction crew when the railroad began at Mound House in 1880.

By the time the tracks had reached Laws in April of 1883, the depot, agent's house, section boss's house, water tank, and hand-operated turntable were ready for use. The train crews needed boarding houses and entertainment, homes for their families. Construction of stores, restaurants, a blacksmith shop, rooming houses, and a small hotel continued as quickly as carpenters, plumbers, and painters could work, mostly with wood hauled from Mammoth by horse and wagon.

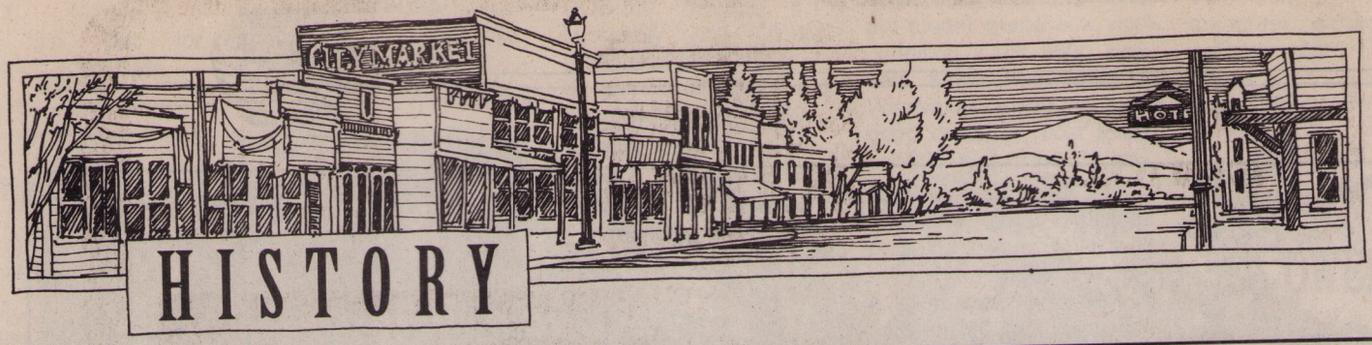
Laws became a solid community of tree-lined streets, old fashioned front porches, stores, and a school. Lee Sheppy's "Opera House" showed motion pictures, with Lee cranking a projector to a pull-down screen. Off-duty train crews and passengers lured into staying overnight in the lively little town found plenty to do with a soda fountain, pool hall, dances, and stores. Kids were allowed to roller skate on the hardwood dance floor. In addition to these and the necessary stockyards, storage and warehouse buildings, there was Able's barber shop, Hugh's Store, Fletcher's Hotel, the Stone Hotel, the Inyo Hotel and cottages, and a lumber yard.

In an interview by Louise Kelsey for *The Album, Times and Tales of Inyo-Mono*, Vada Sproul Cline, a Laws native, called it "the sweetest little town in the whole world." Her father managed the White Mountain Cafe, a two-story social and recreation hall. Nearby ranches provided vegetables, fruit, sheep, chickens, eggs, milk, and beef cattle.

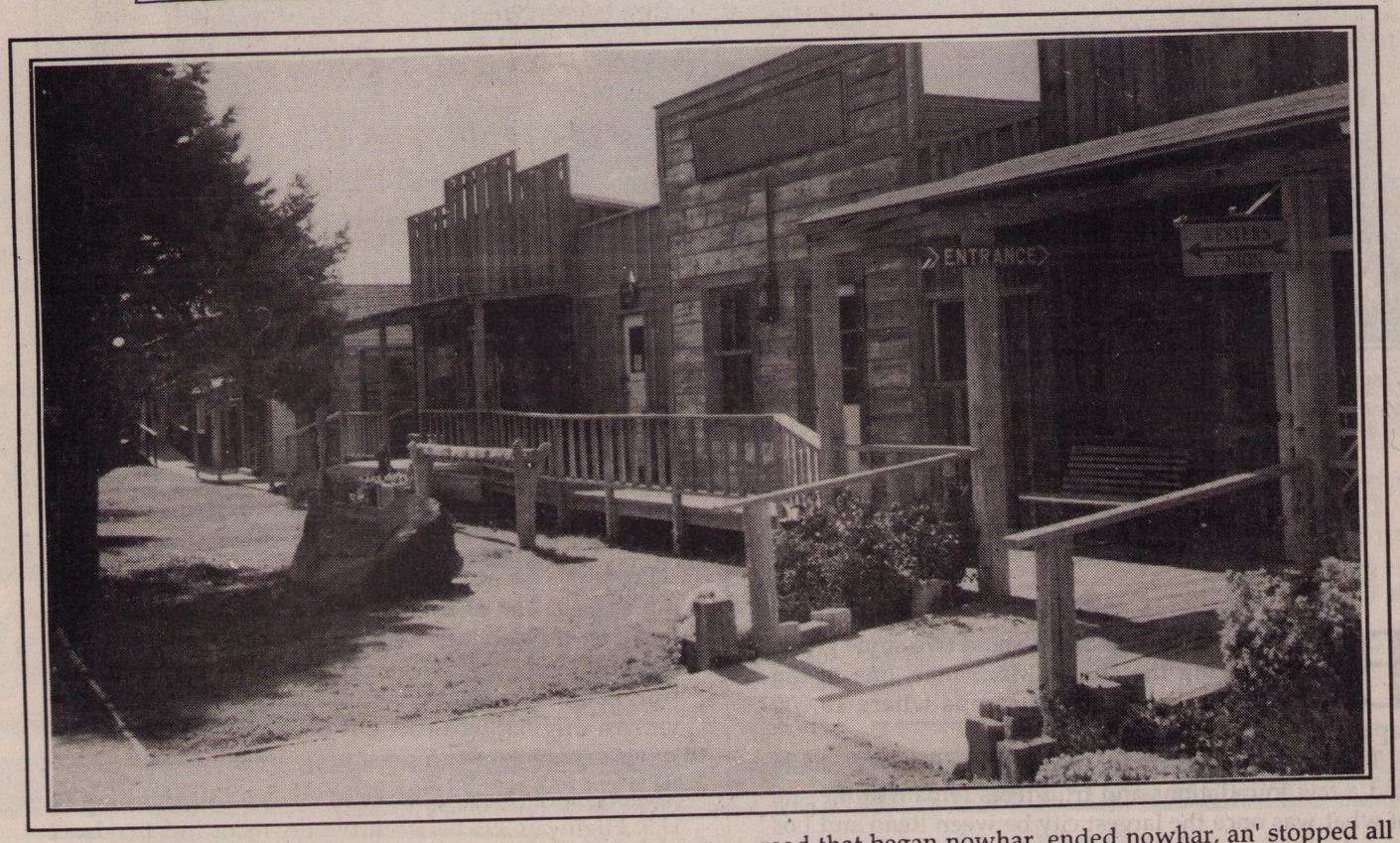
The decline of Laws began with the decline of the mining boom and the coming of truck transportation and family automobiles. The loss of irrigation water from the ranches to the City of Los Angeles added its toll, and the town that had survived for 76 years found its reason for being gone. Passenger service was discontinued in 1932; 1932 to 1938 saw the closing of sections of the railroad in Nevada, and in 1943 the line from Benton to Laws was shut down. By 1950 the only operating service of the narrow gauge railroad was the 71-mile link to Keeler, with mining products the main freight. The final run from Keeler to Laws was April 29, 1960.

Today, the memory of the beloved little town and it's Slim Princess is preserved as the Laws Railroad Museum, where you can visit the original depot and agent's house. Numerous other buildings have been brought in and furnished to typify the era. There are books about railroading and about the Eastern Sierra, and some fine gifts and souvenirs. And you are allowed to climb up into the cab of Engine No. 9 to ring the bell and listen to echoes of a busy past.

–Jane Fisher



HISTORY



Laws Railroad Museum

◆

The days of trains whistling through sprawling sage and ranch lands surrounded by towering mountains, come to life again at the tiny township of Laws. The once-bustling station town is now the home of the Laws Railroad Museum, an 11-acre tribute to the Owens Valley pioneer era.

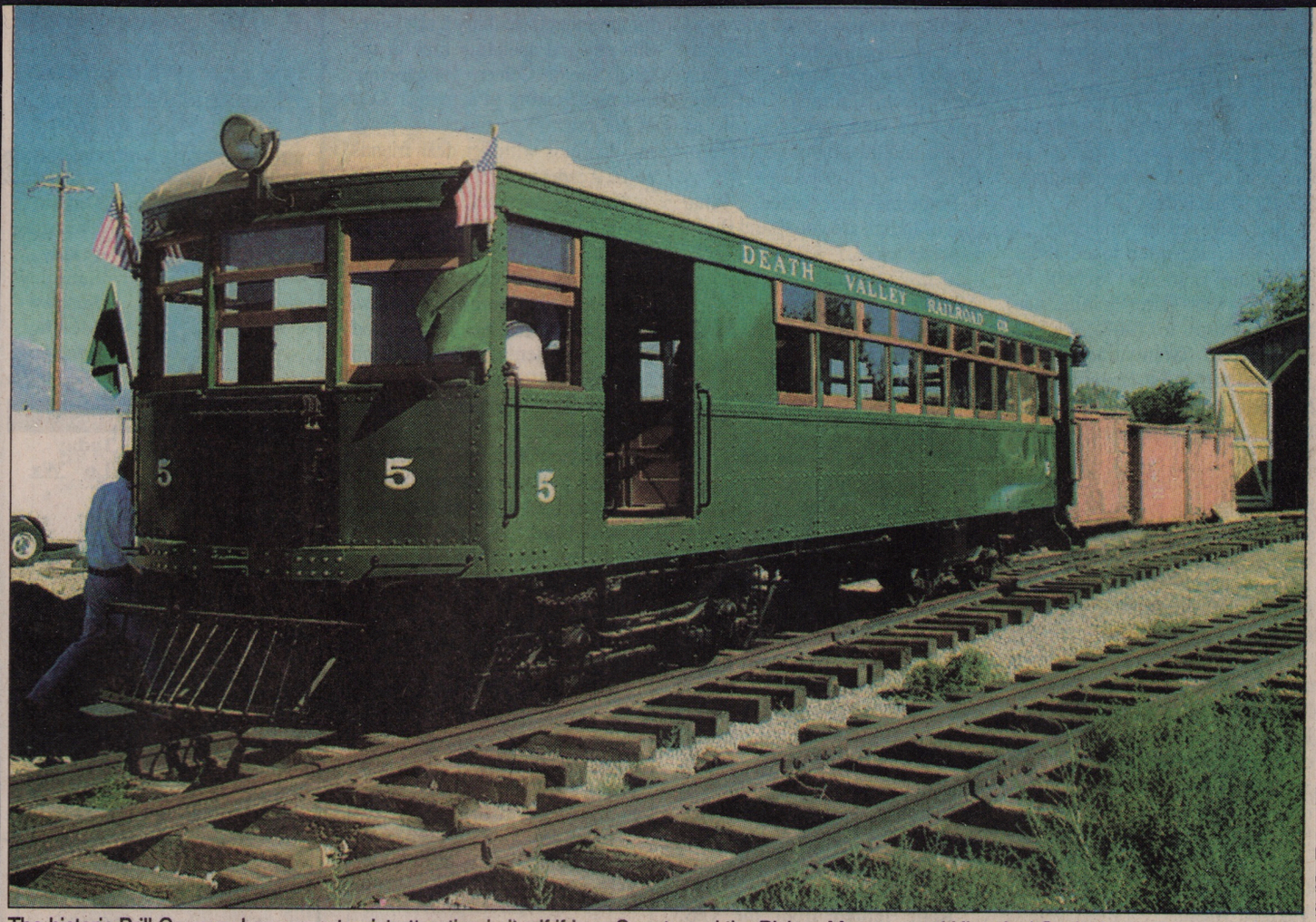
Upon your arrival, friendly local folk will issue a free ticket just across the wooden walkway at the museum reception center. You're entitled to climb into the cab of Locomotive No. 9 to ring the bell, or explore the other narrow gauge railroad cars and stroll through the village of historic wooden buildings.

Wry humor and the railroad revival romance will greet you at every turn. The old wooden depot is replete with authentic train trunks, spike pullers, switchman lanterns and gadgets galore. "The Slim Princess, the railroad that began nowhar, ended nowhar, an' stopped all night to think it over," proclaims a scrolling hand-lettered sign.

More than a dozen other buildings await visitors, packed with more period furnishing and memorabilia. All portray a time in the 1880s when life revolved around mining, ranching and farming, when the stagecoach ride to Los Angeles took 12 days, and the railroad line roared with importance.

Take a trip back into the past every Saturday, July through August. Western adventures, hay rides, shootouts, artists exhibits, great barbecues, Native American exhibitions of song and dance, and stories of our past are only part of the Laws experience.

To reach the museum take U.S. Highway 6 north toward Tonopah for 5 miles. At the junction with Silver Canyon Road turn right and follow the signs a half mile east to the compound. The facilities are open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily in the summer and on weekends in the winter. Admission is free. Call (619) 873-5950 for information.



The historic Brill Car may become a tourist attraction in itself if Inyo County and the Bishop Museum and Historical Society can agree on a lease that would hand the locomotive over to the Historical Society and allow it to offer short rides to residents and visitors. Photo by Mike Gervais

Real rail rides on track for Bishop?

County staff may have worked out lease solution to make Brill Car trips a reality, with no liability for Inyo

By Mike Gervais 1-29-2009
Register Staff

Inyo County and the Bishop Museum and Historical Society are back on track to begin offering residents and visitors rides on the historic Brill Car at Laws Railroad Museum.

Because the Brill Car is actually owned by Inyo County, staff at Laws Railroad Museum and members of the historical society appeared to be derailed in their effort Tuesday to call members of the public aboard the train due to insurance liabilities.

But Assistant County Counsel Randy Keller and Museum Services Director Jon Klusmire discovered a light at the end of the tunnel when they found that Laws and/or the historical society could incur all the liability if they were to lease the locomotive.

"This seems to be a good approach that would get each side's responsibilities down in writing," Klusmire said Tuesday.

Back in May of 2008, the Inyo County Board of Supervisors waived all fees for a California Environmental Quality Act review related to operating the Brill Car as a tourist attraction.

Upon completion, that review revealed "no significant impacts or a categorical exemption under CEQA."

According to Klusmire, because Inyo County does not have any expertise in the operation of railroad equipment or conducting public rides and is not in the position to inspect or oversee such operations, it could be held liable for any accidents that could occur while its locomotive is in operation.

In a brief example of what such a lease would look like, Klusmire said "the (museum and Historical) Society would agree to defend and indemnify the county for any claims or damages against the county arising from the ride operations and would obtain insurance acceptable to the county Risk Manager to cover those risks."

According to Klusmire, the county would lease the Brill Car, tracks, passenger loading facilities and anything else the Historical Society would need to offer rides on the Brill Car. In exchange the Society would be responsible for maintaining and operating the leased equipment in a condition that was safe for the public.

"Compensation for the county would be the maintenance of the equipment, so no payments would be necessary," Klusmire's staff report states. "The Society would be allowed to retain monies generated from the ride to maintain the equipment."

The next step for the county is to draft the lease agreement.

"Mr. Jim Morrow, president of the Bishop Museum and Historical Society, has indicated the Historical Society would be willing to enter into such a lease, after it is reviewed by the Historical Society board and its legal counsel," Klusmire said. He added that "it doesn't seem to be a huge time-consuming effort."

The board backed that move unanimously, directing county counsel staff to draft the lease agreement.

"I think this is an excellent plan," said Third District Supervisor Beverly Brown.

Second District Supervisor Susan Cash thanked Klusmire "for helping to move this down the track."

Take a ride on the Brill Car ... soon

County staff work out deal to allow Laws to give public rides on refurbished relic

By Mike Gervais
Register Staff 4-23-2009

The old Death Valley No. 5 Brill Car, deteriorated over the years after it was taken off line. In 2004, a group of gear-head volunteers at Laws Railroad Museum began the lengthy restoration process, and now, the story of No. 5 is complete as Laws prepares to begin offering passenger rides in the locomotive.
File photos

Laws Railroad Museum will begin offering rides on the refurbished Brill Car as soon as this summer, thanks to action taken by the Inyo County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday.

"This should be the end of the road and the start of the train," Inyo County Museum Services Administrator Jon Klusmire said as he presented the board with a new lease agreement for the locomotive that will allow for passenger rides a couple times a year.

Volunteers at Laws began work on the Brill Car back in 2004 utilizing federal Transportation Enhancement Act grant money. The original plan was to offer rides on the diesel-powered locomotive once it was running, but insurance and liability issues have been a factor in the delay reaching that goal until now.

The museum has been able to bring the train out for demonstrations a couple times a year, and even reached an agreement with its insurance company to let residents board the locomotive, but offering rides has, until this week, been out of the question.

Inyo County owns the land and buildings at Laws, and it also owns the Brill Car itself. The Museum and Historical Society maintains and operates Laws under a lease agreement with the county. Though there has been a standing lease, it did not permit the museum or its volunteers to allow passengers on the Brill Car when it was in operation due to the liability issues.

The board unanimously approved a negative declaration for an environmental review on operations of the Brill Car, saying that there will be no significant impacts. The board also approved a lease agreement with Laws, allowing the locomotive to operate.

"The 10-year lease is complete," Klusmire said. "The Museum and Historical Society really went out of their way to work with us on this, and we got some good direction from the board."

Second District Supervisor Susan Cash, whose district includes Laws, thanked Klusmire and Assistant County Counsel Randy Keller for their hard work and diligence on the complicated lease and liability matter.

"This may have taken a while, but it was always progressing," she said, adding that coming up with such a lease is never an easy task.

Jim Morrow, president of the Museum and Historical Society, thanked the board for its help and direction in the museum's attempts to get the Brill Car running.

He said the museum plans to begin offering rides on the Brill Car this summer during Mule Days. "We can also use the Death Valley Car for living history demonstrations" and class presentations, he said.

The car will also operate during the Laws Good Ole Days celebration each year.

During the rides, the locomotive will not leave the museum grounds.

Museum to offer first rides to public Memorial Day weekend

By Mike Gervais
Register Staff 5-14-2009

Summer is coming and it's bringing residents and visitors an opportunity to catch a ride on the Laws Railroad Museum's Death Valley Brill Car.

Residents are invited and encouraged to mark their calendars and experience living history Mule Days weekend, Sunday, May 24 and Monday, May 25, when the conductors will offer the first – and long-awaited – public rides on the restored locomotive.

The Brill Car will be running between 10:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. both days and will cost $3 per person. Children under 13 ride for free when they are accompanied by an adult.

"A ride will last 10-15 minutes and we'll do rides every half hour or so," Museum and Historical Society President Jim Morrow said.

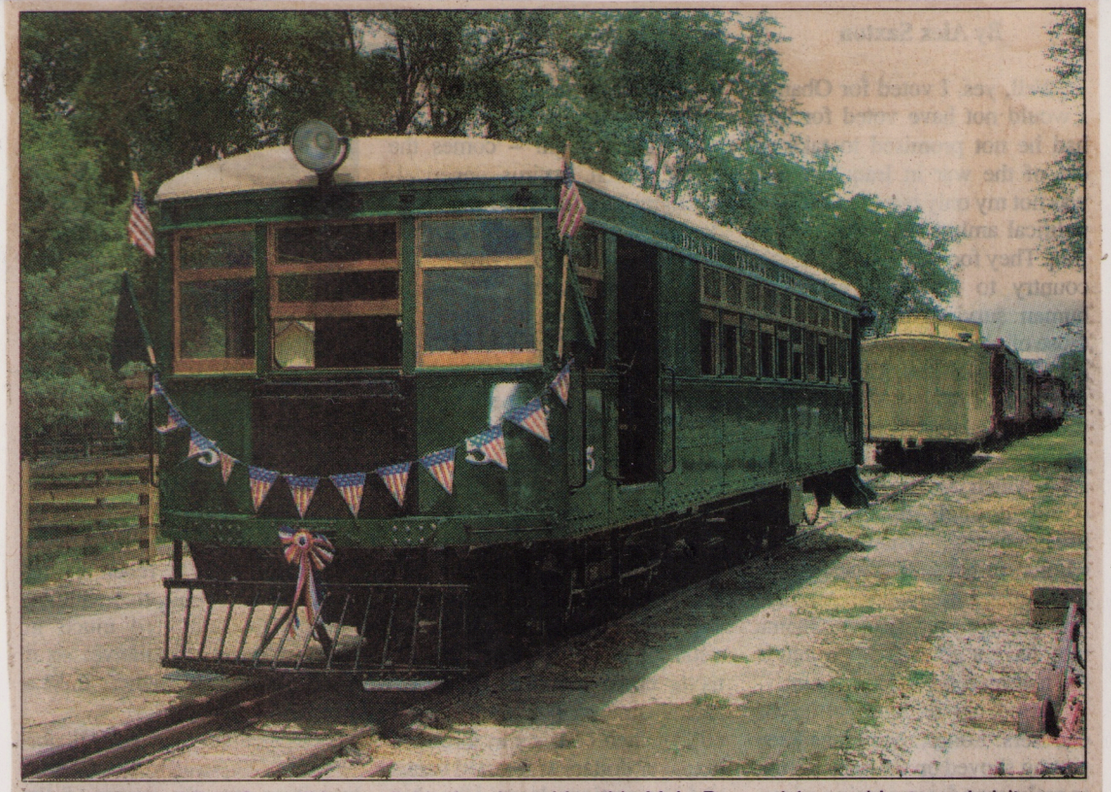
The short trip will take visitors from the depot at the entrance of Laws out past the water tanks at the back of the property. From there the conductor will get out and "flip a switch," realigning the tracks to bring riders back to the depot.

All museum exhibits will also be open and residents and visitors are invited to bring a picnic lunch Mule Days weekend and check out the museum grounds and take a ride on the historic Death Valley locomotive.

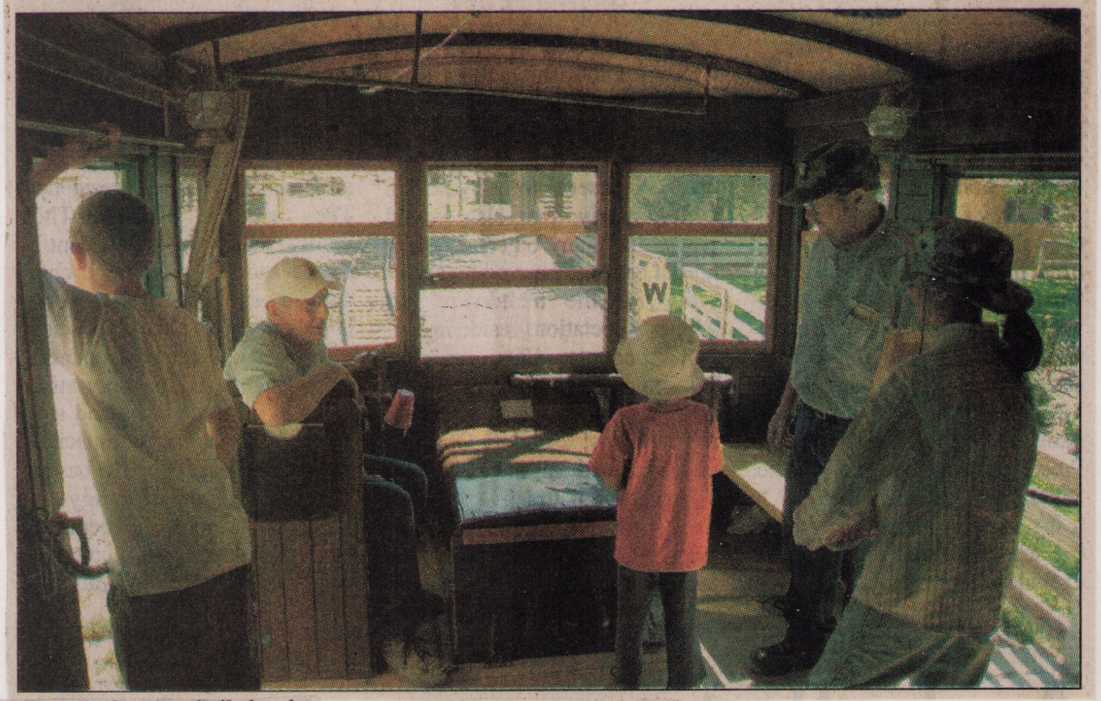
Laws is also planning to run the car Fourth of July weekend and Labor Day weekend.

"What we're aiming for is to do it on three-day weekends because that's when we get the most visitors," Morrow said, adding that museum staff is currently looking for an alternative route to run the Brill Car during the Good Ole Days celebration. Morrow said that the tracks near the Agent's House at Laws are generally too busy to run the car during Good Ole Days, but, if a new route can be arranged, the Museum and Historical Society said it would like to have the car running during that event.

Morrow also said the Brill Car is handicapped accessible, so everyone is welcome to a ride. He added that the museum is open to large, private groups, such as school classes, for living history lessons.



The refurbished Brill Car will be available for short rides this Mule Days, giving residents and visitors an opportunity to experience "living history." The Bishop Museum and Historical Society will be offering 10- to 15-minute rides for a $3 donation. File photos



The Brill Car was built by the J.G. Brill Company in Philadelphia, Penn. in 1927 for tourist traffic in Death Valley. After a few years of service, the car was taken off line. It was donated to Inyo County in 1967 in a state of disarray.

The Bishop Museum and Historical Society had long-standing plans to restore the car when a federal Transportation Enhancement Act grant was made available in 1999.

Inyo County and Caltrans helped the Museum and Historical Society apply for the $146,000 grant and work began.

"There were seven of us who went from start to finish and at least a dozen people who helped here and there with the restoration," Morrow said.

It took the volunteer crew four-and-a-half years to rebuild the locomotive's diesel engine, refurbish the interior, wire the lighting and paint the old car.

The restoration was completed in 2004 and the Museum and Historical Society immediately began looking into the possibility of running the Brill Car for museum visitors.

Those plans were stopped in their tracks when quotes on insurance came in. But over the years, the Museum and Historical Society was able to work out an agreement with Inyo County that allows the society to assume all liability for the car's operations. They received official county approval to move ahead with the rides on April 21.

"It feels pretty good to have this sorted out," Morrow said. "Ever since it was completed, we've wanted to give rides to people and let them see what's it's like in the car."

L-11-91

Bishop Museum and Historical Society

BISHOP, CALIFORNIA

LOAN ☐
GIFT XX ☐

7500.00
XX
120.00

OFFICE OF CURATOR

Received of Kenny Scruggs Enid Larson Estate

Whose Address is Attorney at Law, P.O. Box 1797

Bishop, Ca 93515 *Phone* _____

The objects listed herein are to become a part of the Laws Museum and Historical Site to be displayed and/or exhibited in accordance with the rules and regulations as set forth by the Bishop Museum and Historical Society, also the donor is solely responsible for the estimated values shown.

	Estimated Value
1 - Fireplace Mantle - Mahogny w/hand carved 1 leaf design	$ 750.00
1 - 2' x 3½' framed beveled Mirror	120.00
1 - Trunk w/assorted lace petticoats, hand bag, small loom, hats, cooking stove and ivory hand mirror	125.00

Also
- Antique Foot Stool
- Large dresser with hinged, swinging mirror
- 1916 Edison diamond-disk phonograph

Thank you!!

If such objects are loaned, the Society agrees to exercise ordinary care in their preservation, and to return the same to lender or his authorized representative upon presentation of a copy of this receipt.

Signed _____ *Curator*

Date Oct 1991 *By* Anne J Boothe

No. L-11-91 *Signature of Donor* _____

CHALFANT PRESS

L-11-87

Bishop Museum and Historical Society

BISHOP, CALIFORNIA

LOAN ☐
GIFT ☒X

OFFICE OF CURATOR

Received of Enid Larson

Whose Address is 170 Flower Alley

Big Pine, Ca 93513 *Phone* _____

The objects listed herein are to become a part of the Laws Museum and Historical Site to be displayed and/or exhibited in accordance with the rules and regulations as set forth by the Bishop Museum and Historical Society, also the donor is solely responsible for the estimated values shown.

Estimated Value

One - Walnut, hand carved, Bedstead with slats, box springs and mattress.

(May give matching dresser later)

If such objects are loaned, the Society agrees to exercise ordinary care in their preservation, and to return the same to lender or his authorized representative upon presentation of a copy of this receipt.

Signed ~~Bishop Museum & Historical Society~~ *Curator*

Date 6-24-87 *By* Alice J. Booche Admin

No. L-11-87 *Signature of Donor* _____

CHALFANT PRESS

SELECTING THE RAILROAD ROUTE
By Dave Babb

In the summer of 1881, Mr. James Oliver, Chief Engineer of the Carson & Colorado Railroad passed down the Valley to Lone Pine then went northward on the east side of the Owens River - - laying stakes for appropriating the route for the coming railroad.

Then, in January of 1882, he returned with Assistant Superintendent R. J. Laws. They stopped in Independence where they told Editor Parker of the Inyo Independent that their chief business was "to ascertain the comparative advantages of the routes open to the road - - on the east or west sides of Owens River and the Lake.

Of course, Editor Parker had to express his opinion that all the towns and farms were on the west side, while on the east side was the barren stretch at the base of the Inyo Mountains. The west side had the population and businesses, while the east side had most of the mines. Parker admitted that the Valley averaged only 10 or 12 miles in width, "so locomotives, cars and telegraphs anywhere would be 'good enough'."

But - - Parker confidently stated that "we are inclined to believe that the main line will run on this side, through Bishop, Big Pine, Independence, Lone Pine and Olancha - - the work of constructing a branch road along the base of the Inyo's being only a simple matter".

WRONG !

CARSON & COLORADO
By Dave Babb

The year 1877 marked the beginning of several lean years for Owens Valley farmers due to the decline in the mining camps of the region - - the primary markets for local produce. The Valley's isolation prevented farmers from shipping to distant markets.

The Inyo Independent began to lobby for a railroad connection to Los Angeles by way of Mojave. But - - when the Bishop Creek Times of December 17, 1881 announced that the Carson & Colorado narrow-gauge line would be in Owens Valley in a year or so, some farmers were actually opposed to the idea - - saying it could reduce the price for crops. It was decided, however, that the railroad would eventually be of great overall benefit to the growth of the region.

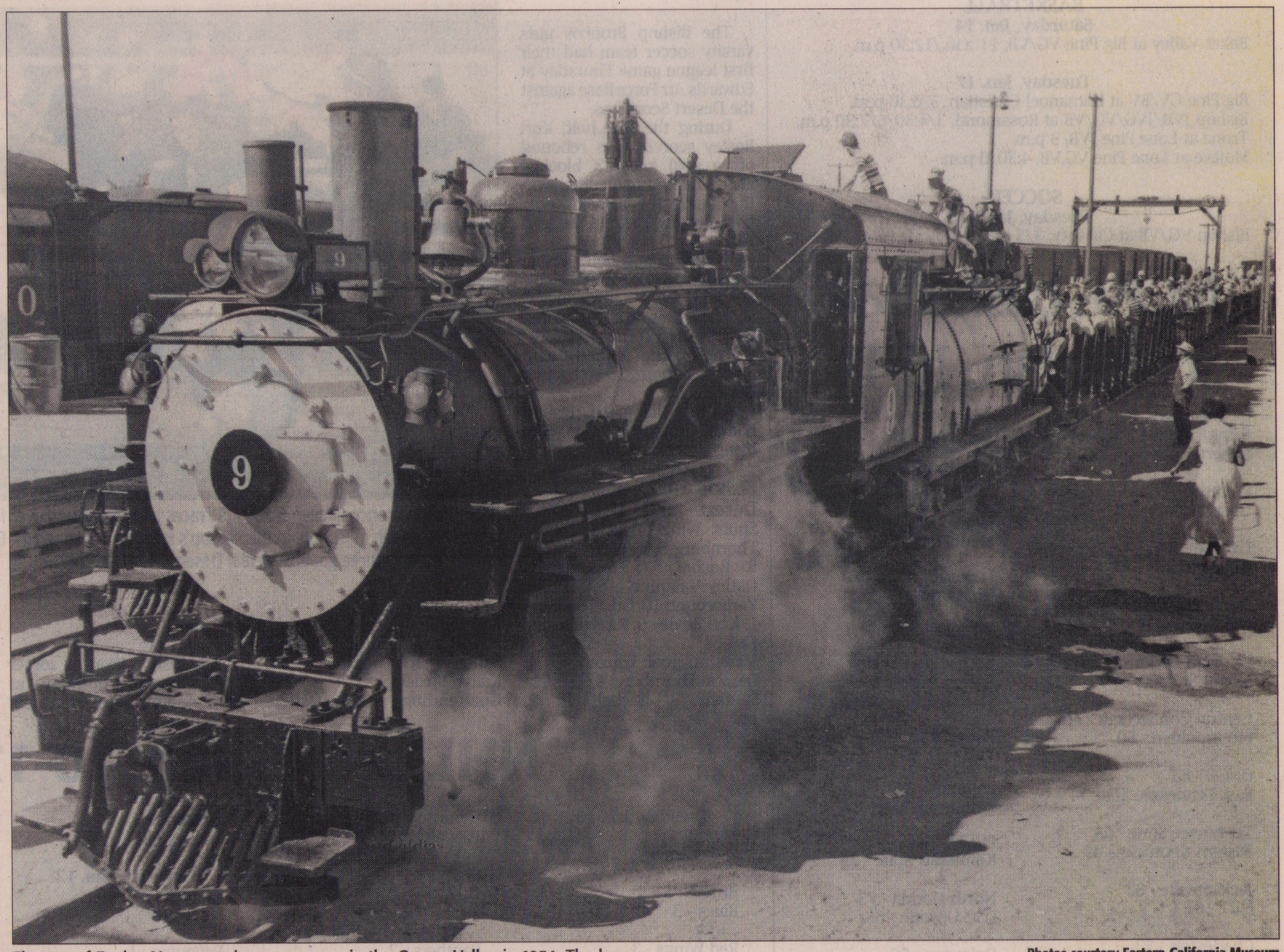
By January 1883, the rail line had been completed from Mound House, Nevada, to Benton, and by March It reached Laws - - then called Bishop Station. Renamed "Laws Station", for Robert J. Laws, the Station Superintendent, the depot began operation in April 1883. By July, the line was completed to Keeler, and train service was initiated in August.

So, with the arrival of the Carson & Colorado, the Valley was finally linked to the outside world. But this was not exactly the solution that local farmers were looking for - - because the railroad came from the north instead of the south.

The building of the railroad line had actually been inspired by a need to haul ore from the mines in the valley, but it had taken three years for the rails to be laid from Mound House to Laws. By that time, the mining activity had peaked and was nearly over.

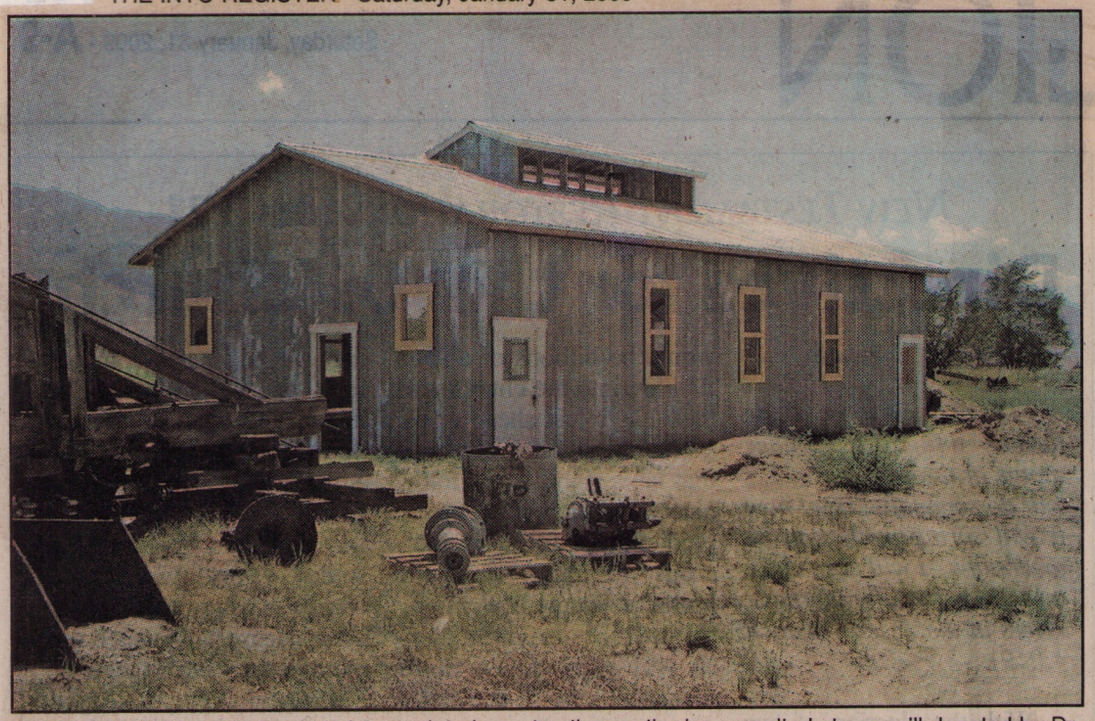
While the railroad did broaden the beef market to some extent, making it possible to ship livestock to San Francisco, it did little to stimulate the slumping farm economy. Shipping produce to the transcontinental Central Pacific line at Reno required changing from narrow-gauge to standard gauge rails, making the freight costs exceedingly high - - too high, in fact, for the shipment of the majority of farm products out of Owens Valley.

In March of 1900 the Carson & Colorado was sold to Southern Pacific for $2.75 million, and R .J. Laws was retained as Superintendent. In 1932, passenger service was discontinued and the track north of Laws was removed. On April 30, 1960, Locomotive No. 9, the "Slim Princess", made her last run.



The run of Engine No. 9 carrying passengers in the Owens Valley in 1954. The locomotive is now at the Laws Railroad Museum and Historical Village.

Photos courtesy Eastern California Museum



Laws Railroad Museum has nearly completed construction on the long-awaited stamp mill donated by Dr. Carl Lind. The new exhibit should open to the public by this summer. Photo submitted

New at Laws Railroad Museum

By Larry Paglia
Special to The Inyo Register.

A much anticipated project is well under way at Laws Museum and a group of volunteers are all smiles.

It all started several years ago when Dr. Carl Lind offered the equipment at the old Rudolph Mill, located in Chalfant Valley, to the museum for a historical display. With the help of the Owens Valley Conservation Camp, the remains of the 1900s mill was dismantled and stored at the museum. Due to a lack of funds the mill remained in storage.

In 2006 a grant was applied for. After considerable delay, the grant was approved for replicating the old mill as well as the creation of a textile display in a separate building, as part of a different project.

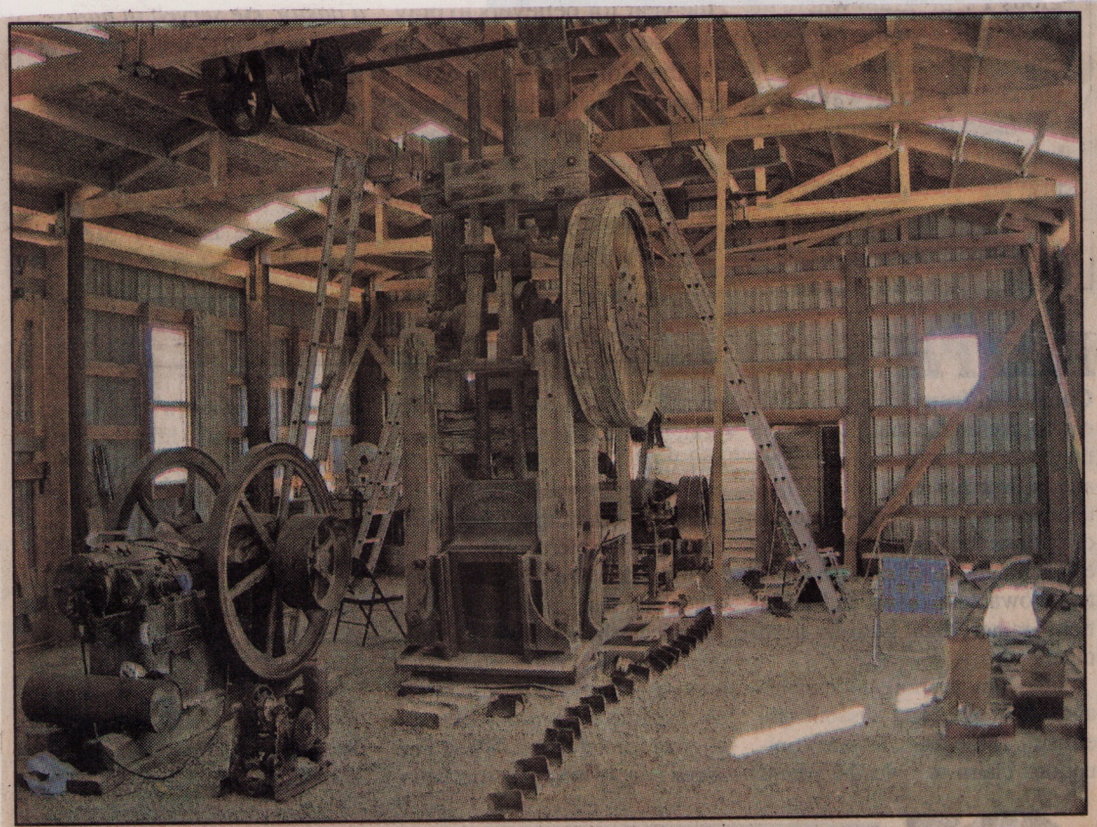
Some work was started in the fall of 2006 but the project had to be put on hold. In the spring of 2007, volunteers, again with the help of the O.V.C.C., resumed work on the project.

The project consisted of erecting a 30-foot by 50-foot corrugated metal building (similar to the completed train barn), and installing as a static display; stamps, crushers, engine, amalgam table and related shafts and belts.

Though there were delays due to fire suppression calls during which the O.V.C.C. crew was absent, the project did move along nicely. By December of 2008 the structure was completed and work moved on to the installation of the equipment. The stamp has been mounted on a concrete base, the one-lunger gasoline engine is set up and two crushers are mounted on wood stringers.

The next phase in the project will involve the feeders, drive belts and shafts, amalgam table and completing the mine adit and joining rail. When the project is completed this will replicate the processing of ore from mine to concentrate.

Laws Museum would like to express its thanks to the individual volunteers, groups and businesses that have contributed to making this project a success.



With the help of the Owens Valley Conservation Camp, the stamp mill at Laws is almost finished. The new exhibit includes historic equipment, including the stamp, mounted on a concrete base. Photo submitted

LAWS MUSEUM CELEBRATES 125 YEARS

2010

Preserving the history of the Owens Valley and the Eastern Sierra, the 11 acres of unique sites and exhibits that make up Laws Museum celebrates 125 years since the railroad town of Laws began.

On May 10, 1880, the Carson and Colorado Railroad Company was formed and incorporated by William Sharon, H. M. Yerington and Darius Mills. They planned to run the narrow gauge railroad from Mound House, Nevada, and the Carson River to the Colorado River, calling it the C&C Railroad. It never reached the Colorado River but stopped at Keeler, California. It has often been referred to as "the railroad that was built 300 miles too long or 300 years too soon."

As word got out that the railroad would run east of the Owens River, people started to arrive at what is now known as Laws and a new railroad town was built. It took three years for the rails to be laid from Mound House to Laws, with the first train arriving in April, 1883. The depot, agent's house, section boss's house, outhouses, water tank and turntable were all ready when it arrived.

In addition to the railroad buildings, other construction quickly followed including many homes, barns and corrals, two general stores, a rooming house, eating house, hotel, boarding house, pool hall and dance hall, blacksmith shop, post office, barber shop and powder warehouses. Several industrial buildings followed later. Many ranches surrounded Laws and used the railroad to ship their crops.

The decline and demise of Laws and the railroad were the result of the local mines closing, trucking becoming cheaper than rail freight and the city of Los Angeles buying most of the valley for water rights. By 1959 when the railroad ceased operation, there was no trace of most of the buildings at Laws, as they had all been torn down for salvage. Only the depot, agent's house, oil and water tanks and the turntable survived. All the other buildings you see at the museum today were doomed for destruction but were saved and moved to the museum grounds.

Since that day, when the last train arrived at Laws, there were those who dreamed of preserving the site, against adverse conditions. The Laws Museum has done a wonderful job over many decades of preserving this historical site and the many relics within.

There are those who have passed the station, occupied with their thoughts, and scarcely giving it a glance. They were in the minority. Among the others were: the retired engineer who stood by Old No. 9 remembering the day his hand was on the throttle...the elderly couple who stopped to recall the day a youthful bride-to-be was met at the station...a former valley rancher from a piece down the track whose thoughts included days of long ago when the little engine whistled his milk cows off the tracks...the ex-sheepman who paused to let his mind drift back to when he had loaded sheep at his ranch for shipment to northern markets...the salesman, banker and miner who had stepped down from the coach after a long, hot ride, to take their place in a new community...the soldier who had waved goodbye as he departed for the war… and many, many others who would be pleased if the depot and "Slim Princess" could be retained for future generations to view and enjoy.

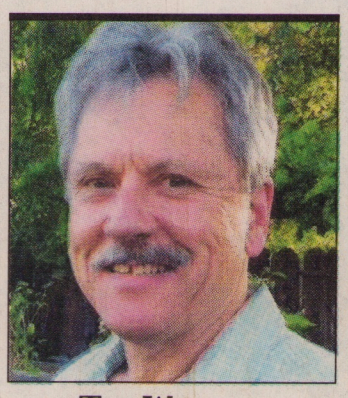
The Laws Railroad Museum and Historic Site is located on land donated to Inyo County and the City of Bishop by the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1964. The museum is operated by the Bishop Museum and Historical Society under contract with those two agencies. The gift deed from the Southern Pacific Company to the county and city reads as follows: "In appreciation of the interest of Inyo County and the City of Bishop in preserving the memory of the Far West's last common carrier narrow gauge railroad, the Keeler Branch, Southern Pacific Company is pleased to donate steam locomotive No. 9 together with other rolling stock and the Laws Station building and surrounding installations for safekeeping in behalf of generations to come."

At Laws, the Slim Princess now stands in mute testimony to the time when the Owens Valley depended upon the railroad for its contact with other parts of the world.

To find out more about the history of Laws Railroad Museum and Historical Society call 760-873-5950 or go to **www.lawsmuseum.org**
The museum is open all year from 10 am to 4 pm. Admission is by donation.

Fascinating audio stories bring to life the human and natural history of the 395 corridor. The Slim Princess operated along the east side of Owens Valley.

The Red Apple Route



TED WILLIAMS
COLUMNIST

This 1911 photo shows some of the men and mules who spent their summer completing the railroad grade from Bishop to Laws.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Merril photo, Arthur D. Haig Collectio

6-25-2016

In the year 1908 Owens Valley residents had already been riding the Carson and Colorado Railroad for nearly 25 years. But now grumbling began to surface from a frustrated population; the train was on the wrong side of the Valley. The railroad was built specifically to serve mining operations on the east side, but the population centers were to the west. Residents wanted a railroad connecting their towns and they were ready to make it happen.

A headline in the September 1908 edition of the *Big Pine Herald* announced "BIG PINE HAS A DEPOT SITE FOR RAILROAD: Free Right-of-Way Movement Gains Immediate Support." Local resident J.H Coe was quoted as saying, "there is nothing of greater importance to the people of the west side of this valley than the building of a standard gauge (railroad) on this side." He and others offered free land to Southern Pacific for right-of-ways, but it went nowhere. A few years later, some enterprising men attempted to capitalize on this longing.

Since 1883, to catch a ride on the Carson and Colorado, travelers from Bishop had to endure a horse and buggy ride across four miles of bumpy, dusty dirt roads to get to Laws Depot. Some trips could take over an hour; and later, early automobile drivers did their best to avoid flat tires. When residents smelled rain in the air, it could be a muddy trip as well.

After nearly 30 years, Bishop was ready to join the modern world of transportation. Three men stepped forward and proposed a railroad between Bishop and Laws Depot. But first they had to visit a man in Nebraska.

In 1910 one of the three men, Charles Johnson, traveled to South Omaha, Neb., to meet one C. Carey to secure a railroad franchise. This would lay out the state and federal ground rules for the construction and operation of a railroad. They successfully secured the franchise. But that was it, nothing else happened, and plans to move forward never materialized. However, someone else was waiting in the wings.

Later that year, according to *The San Francisco Call* newspaper, "Articles of incorporation of the 'Owens River Valley electric railway company' formed to construct and operate a railroad in the Owens River Valley … the company is capitalized at $200,000." That number represents a potential company income of $4 million in today's dollars. With that news, Charles Johnson decided to turn over his railroad franchise to the two men who started the company, who in turn began to initiate their grand plan.

The Owens River Valley Electric Railway Company's president was Harry Shaw who, according to the book "Railroads of Nevada and Eastern California," "was also president of the Owens Valley Bank, veteran of a full seven months banking operations." Shaw's inferred lack of banking experience, combined with some creative stock incentives, made for a colorful episode in Bishop's history.

Their plan was for a four-and-a-half-mile railroad, actually an electric trolley, between Bishop and Laws. As railways went, it was an unimpressive distance; so for credibility, plans for a 12-mile connection was added from Bishop to Round Valley, along with a 16-mile connection from Bishop to Big Pine. But Laws was their main goal. The next step was raising cash, and they were banking on the temptation of apples.

Offices were opened in Bishop in early 1911 and a full-page advertisement was placed in *The Inyo Register* promoting their plan and offering stock in the company, which included a "bonus" stock. H.N. Beard, the company general manager, had his eye on an agricultural investment: the "bonus" stock was for a 1,300-acre apple orchard, nearly two square miles in size.

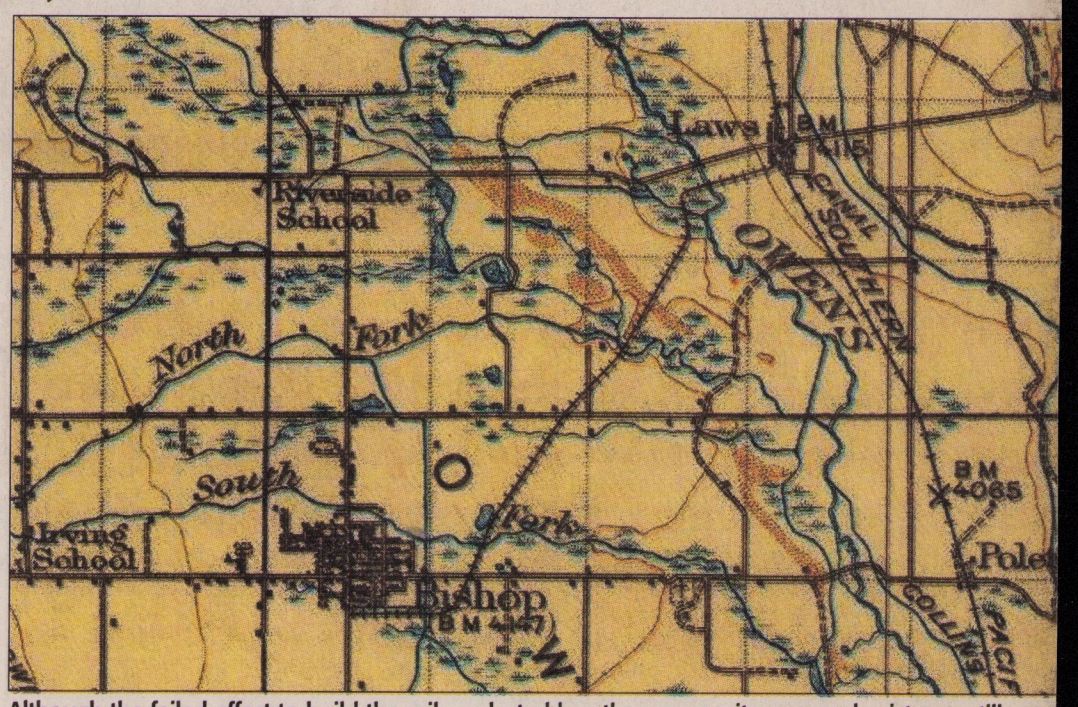
This stock incentive was detailed in the company's promotional booklet titled "The Big Red Apple – The Money Tree." Soon local wags, the jokesters of the time, tossed out a nickname for the new railway, "The Red Apple Route." The name stuck and word was out.

Residents woke up to a stack of headlines in the Feb. 9, 1911 edition of *The Inyo Register*: "BIG DEVELOPMENT ENTERPRISES: "Preliminary Surveys for Bishop and Laws Electric Railway to Begin This Month and Construction to Begin by Midsummer," "IMPROVEMENT AND COLONIZATION BY A MILLION-DOLLAR COMPANY: Over Two Hundred Thousand Dollar Investment in Orchard Land is Highest Mark Yet Reached in Inyo County Record."

The story revealed the company's directors were "San Franciscans," but promised local control of the company as "additional stock will be sold to outside buyers only after the local people have majority control." They insisted that local directors would soon be chosen only from of a list of prominent locals. Name dropping of current stockholders included Bulpitt, Watterson, Schober and Gerkin.

As for the record-breaking orchard land investment, *The Register* stated, "First payments on purchase … will be made on over 2,000 acres of Sunland district land within one week." It had yet to be purchased. Regardless, work began on the Red Apple Route.

By late March 1911, the Owens River Valley Electric Railway Company had completed surveying the railway. The Red Apple Route would run four and a half miles from Laws Depot, across the Owens River, travel southwest past the northern end of today's airport, cross the East Line Street canal near Hanby, and connect to Bishop's South Main Street at what is now High County Lumber. With the survey complete, grading was next; but first, the festivities.



Although the failed effort to build the railway lasted less than a year, its assumed existence still man aged to show up on this 1913 USGS topo map.

On a Saturday morning, June 16, 1911, stores on Main Street closed for a two-hour parade celebrating the beginning of construction of the Red Apple Route. Twenty-five horseless carriages paraded down Main Street, but the planned musical entertainment failed to materialize. The celebration included long and passionate orations expounding the many benefits of the railway. Within the copious, colorful proclamations was a loosely stated claim that enough stock had been sold in the company to build the electric railway. Indeed, construction began the following Monday.

Thirty-two men and 60 horses began work on a major month-long cut-and-fill on the Owens River's edge near Laws. After that, the rest of the Red Apple Route construction was a simple raised berm along level ground. For the crossing of creeks and swamps, the Carson and Colorado delivered four railroad cars filled with pipe for the 39 culverts along the route. Next came wood for fencing and possible ties, for that they needed a lumber mill.

The Electric Railway Company purchased land in upper Black Canyon southeast of Bishop in the southern most portion of the White Mountains to build a sawmill. The lumber would be cut from trees from the top of the White Mountains, reportedly including bristlecone pine.

Remnants of the old railroad grade can still be seen today as shown in this decades old image.

ing, culverts, and sawmill were complete. At month's end, the berm was ready for railroad ties, rails, and fencing.

Then things began to faultier.

The Black Canyon sawmill was not living up to expectations. Frequent disruptions in cutting logs delayed the fencing along the right-of-way. Rumors were circulating that the company would use a gas powered engine instead of the proposed electric train, which would rely on relatively new electric power. But the company insisted they would stick with the original plan. Work halted in November of 1911, but they assured work would pick up after winter.

Winter of 1912 came and went with no sign of work on the Red Apple Route. Spring came and went, and still no progress. Finally in the June 20 edition of *The Inyo Register*, one day before the official start of summer, Owens River Valley Electric Railway Company President Harry Shaw declared in a brief story titled "Action Expected" that "large plans are maturing, looking to work on the road in the near future."

The future never arrived.

With the city of Los Angeles purchasing land and water rights to fill its new aqueduct, the downward spiral of the valley's agricultural economy finally reached Bishop. Investor confidence in the apple orchard, and accompanying railway diminished, and the company silently faded away.

However, the dream of a railway did not completely die.

In the early 2000s, locals company for the purpose of finishing what was started nearly 100 years earlier. Volunteers of the newly formed Owens Valley Railway Company tirelessly raised funds and gathered railroad artifacts to build the Red Apple Route.

Train tracks were gathered from around the region and amassed at Laws. A vintage wooden bridge from the abandoned Carson and Colorado railroad was found, disassembled, and brought to Laws to be reassembled over the Owens River. Government funds were acquired to develop an environmental review and plans for the construction of the railway.

But community fundraisers and momentum wasn't enough. Many factors, including the railway's crossing of LADWP land, made the dream unattainable.

Once again, the dream died and all that remains is the railroad grade and a 1913 topo map showing what could have been.

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(With grandparents living in Bishop since the 1940s, Ted Williams moved to the area in 1970 and graduated from Bishop High in 1971. Over the last four decades, he has raised a family, worked in local radio and television, co-produced a documentary on the history of Laws Depot, and became Inyo County Third District Supervisor. Now working for the county as a real property appraiser, he has visited every remote corner of Inyo. His interests include weather, geology, fossils, four-wheeling, birding and hik-

The Slim Princess locomotive Number18, taking on water. This locomotive is being restored by the non-profit Carson and Colorado Railroad, Inc.

Eastern California Museum photos

Passengers board the Southern Pacific train for the last run through the Owens Valley in 1960.

7-25-2015

Railroad played vital role in Inyo County history into 1960s

By the Eastern California Museum

The Carson & Colorado Railroad, the first railroad line to serve Inyo County, was constructed with profits from the famed Virginia & Truckee Railroad and was built to serve the mining centers south of Nevada's famed Comstock Lode and mines, one of the most prolific and profitable mining districts in the West.

The construction of the Carson & Colorado narrow gauge line commenced at Mound House, Nevada, a station on the Virginia & Truckee east of Carson City, on March 31, 1880. By Feb. 28, 1882, the line was completed from Mound House through Dayton, Hawthorn, and Bellville to Candelaria, Nevada; and in March 1882, construction crews began laying track from Candelaria to Montgomery Pass, 7,138 feet above sea level at the north end of the White Mountains. From the summit, the line descended through several deep cuts, filled areas, and tight curves before it approached a 247-foot long, hand-hewn tunnel.

On Jan. 20, 1883, the line was completed to Benton Station, California, and in April train service was initiated to Laws Station, located several miles east of Bishop Creek. Although officials from the Carson & Colorado had met with prominent citizens of Owens Valley prior to the railroad crossing the California-Nevada state line, and had received an offer of 40 acres and a right-of-way for a depot at Bishop Creek, they decided the east side of the valley was more suitable for construction.

This route also brought the track closer to mines in the Inyo Range such as Cerro Gordo. Track was laid south from Laws along on the east side of the Owens River, reaching Hawley (later Keeler) on the eastern shore of Owens Lake in August 1883.

By the time the railroad reached Keeler the Inyo County silver boom had ended, and the Carson & Colorado line was never extended to the Colorado River as originally planned. Nonetheless, the railroad brought an end to the isolation of the Eastern Sierra by providing a link to transcontinental rail lines, despite bypassing major towns and agricultural areas in Owens Valley. Prior to completion of the Carson & Colorado, goods had been freighted to and from the Eastern Sierra and points south by Remi Nadeau's 20-mule team wagons, but now goods were moved north by rail. Local teamsters were still busy, however, hauling goods to and from the west side of Owens Valley and to the railroad sidings and stations east of the Owens River.

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As highways improved in the 1930s, sections of the narrow gauge line through the Eastern Sierra were abandoned. By 1939, the 71.33-mile segment of narrow gauge track between Laws and Keeler was all that remained of the "Slim Princess" line in Owens Valley. Steam locomotives continued to operate on the "Keeler Branch" until 1954, when they were replaced by a new General Electric 450 HP diesel engine. However, this only prolonged the life of the railroad for a few more years.

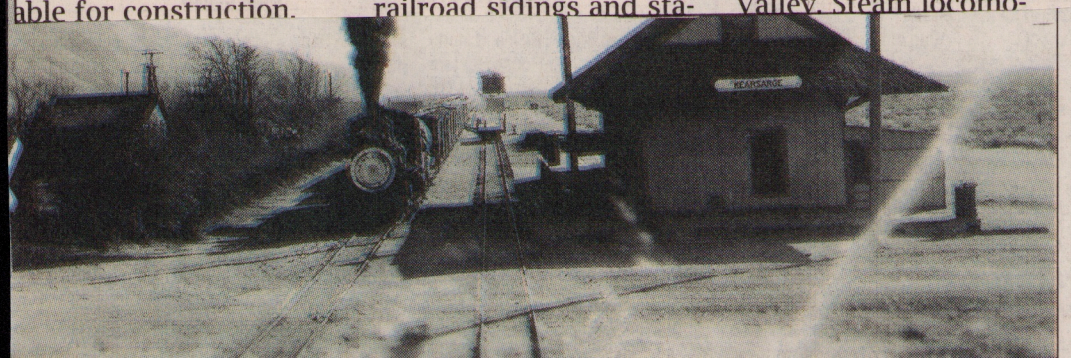
A Southern Pacific crew eating in the caboose, 1946.

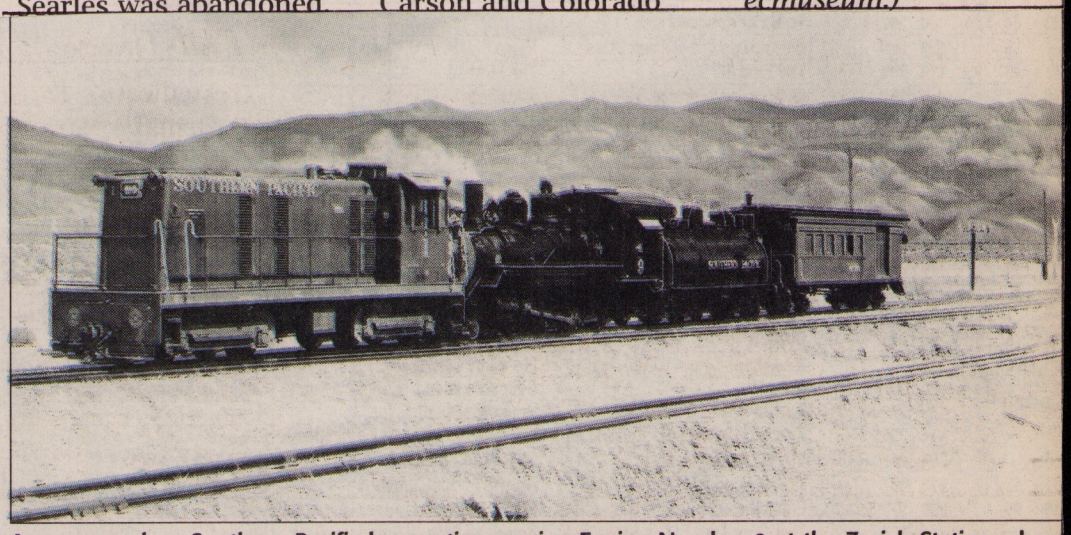
In 1959, Southern Pacific petitioned to abandon the Slim Princess, and despite protests as well as offers to purchase the line as a tourist attraction, the petition was granted. Diesel engine No. 1 made the last trip between Laws and Keeler on April 29, 1960, and by January 1961 the scar of the railroad grade was the only vestige of the Slim Princess that remained. The standard gauge Owenyo Branch was cut back to Lone Pine in April 1960, and in March 1982 the 88.4-mile section of track between Lone Pine and Searles was abandoned.

Today, you can visit the original Carson and Colorado railroad stations at Laws, Lone Pine and Keeler.

NOTE: Today's Carson and Colorado Railroad, Inc. is a non-profit, volunteer group that is working to restore Engine 18, the Slim Princess narrow gauge locomotive located in Dehy Park in Independence. The long-term plan is to move the restored and operational locomotive to the grounds of the Eastern California Museum, where it will be housed in a new building and run on a short stretch of track. The entire effort has been supported by donations of time, material and money from railroad and history fans from across Inyo County, California and the West. More donations are always welcome. For more on the Carson and Colorado group, see carsoncolorado.com or find them on Facebook.

(This description of the Carson & Colorado Railroad can be found on the Virtual Transportation Museum, a "digital department" of the Eastern California Museum, in Independence. The site features educational text and historic photos that provide a concise overview of the history of the Eastern Sierra, from the deserts of Death Valley to the peaks of the Sierra and through the towns in between. The website contains 13 separate sections and more than 500 photos which allow you to travel through the rich past of this unique part of the Eastern Sierra. Log on to www.virtualtransportationmuseum.com, or link to the site through the Eastern California Museum website, www.inyocounty.us/ecmuseum.)





A more modern Southern Pacific locomotive moving Engine Number 9 at the Zurich Station, about

6-29-2019

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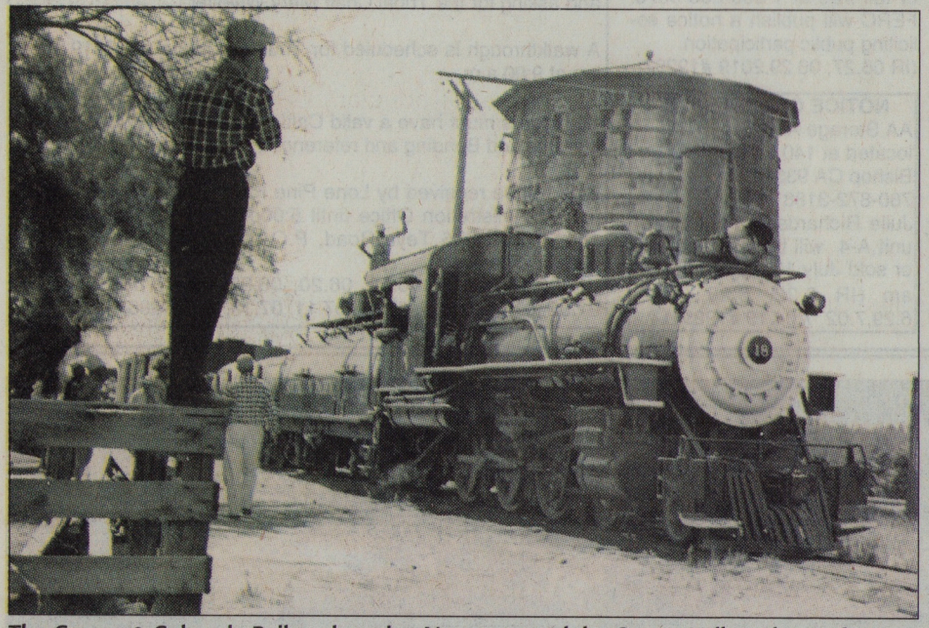
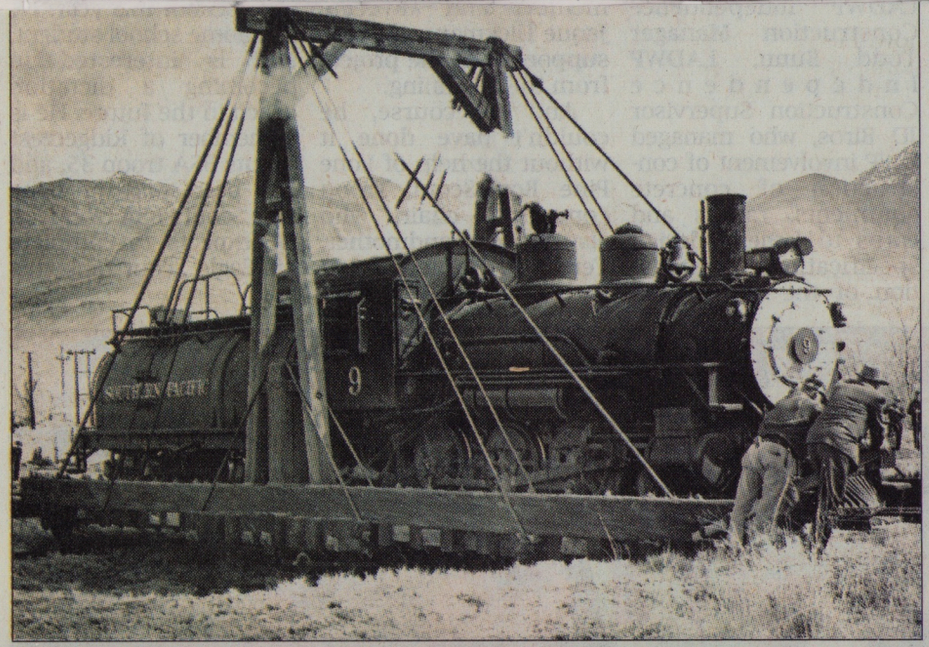


The Carson & Colorado Railroad, engine No. 18, served the Owens Valley. The engine was retired in the 1950s, but has since been restored and is operational.

Passengers board the Southern Pacific train for the last run through the Owens Valley in 1960



Southern Pacific engine No. 9 on the turntable at Laws.

The Kearsarge station, looking south, 1947.

Photos courtesy Eastern California Museum

By the Eastern California Museum

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In February 1908, the Southern Pacific began construction of a standard gauge line from Mojave to the Owens Valley to meet the freighting needs of the City of Los Angeles during construction of the Los Angeles Aqueduct. The line was completed to Owenyo, a depot on the narrow gauge line northeast of Lone Pine, in October 1910, and on October 18 a crowd gathered to watch the driving of the last spike during a ceremony sponsored by the Inyo Good Road Club and the citizens of Lone Pine. Owenyo served as the transfer point for cargo between standard gauge railcars on the "Owenyo Branch" and the Southern Pacific narrow gauge railroad.

As highways improved in the 1930s, sections of the narrow gauge line through the Eastern Sierra were abandoned. By 1939, the 71.33-mile segment of narrow gauge track between Laws and Keeler was all that remained of the "Slim Princess" line in Owens Valley. Steam locomotives continued to operate on the "Keeler Branch" until 1954, when they were replaced by a new General Electric 450 HP diesel engine. However, this only prolonged the life of the railroad for a few more years.

In 1959, Southern Pacific petitioned to abandon the Slim Princess, and despite protests as well as offers to purchase the line as a tourist attraction, the petition was granted. Diesel engine No. 1 made the last trip between Laws and Keeler on April 29, 1960, and by January 1961 the scar of the railroad grade was the only vestige of the Slim Princess that remained. The standard gauge Owenyo Branch was cut back to Lone Pine in April 1960, and in March 1982 the 88.4-mile section of track between Lone Pine and Searles was abandoned.

Today, you can visit the original Carson and Colorado railroad stations at Laws, Lone Pine and Keeler.

(This description of the Carson & Colorado Railroad can be found on the Virtual Transportation Museum, a "digital department" of the Eastern California Museum, in Independence. The site features educational text and historic photos that provide a concise overview of the history of the Eastern Sierra, from the deserts of Death Valley to the peaks of the Sierra and through the towns in between. The website contains 13 separate sections and more than 500 photos which allow you to travel through the rich past of this unique part of the Eastern Sierra. Log on to www.virtualtransportationmuseum.com, or link to the site through the Eastern California Museum website, www.inyocounty.us/ecmuseum.)

Museum building projects nearing completion

Laws officials hope to have renovations finished this spring, summer

Register Staff

With summer steaming its way towards the Eastern Sierra, Laws Railroad Museum is looking forward to the completion of several projects.

Volunteers at Laws have been working on restoring the museum's stamp mill, a restoration project on the Agent's House and improvements on the Textile House.

Those three projects, as well as the refurbishing of Boxcar No. 67, are slated for completion this year.

The stamp mill project has been in the works for some time and is nearing completion.

A mechanical crusher used to refine ore, the stamp mill at Laws includes an authentic looking mine display that includes an ore car, tracks and old-time mining equipment.

In the building that houses the stamp mill, Laws visitors can find the crusher, which came from Mammoth Consolidated Co. On the mill itself, Laws volunteers have tightened and straightened drive belts, lines of various categories have been installed and many machinery parts have been put in place.

The display also includes an assay table complete with instruments, vials, scales, test chemicals, tongs, an oven and a sample crusher.

"Left to do is the gathering of minerals and rocks for the planned comprehensive mineral display from the mines in Inyo County," the museum newsletter states. "And then the finishing touches to make this a most memorable display for the folks who come by to visit."

Museum officials are also excited about the coming completion of the renovation of the Agent's House.

"The Agent's House is now back down on solid ground and its new concrete foundation, thanks to a lot of hard work and considerable know-how by those working on the project," the newsletter states.

Volunteer crews managed to lift the 125-year-old Agent's House last year, with very few breaks or cracks thanks to advance preparation work and the expertise of the crew that did the lifting and lowering.

The Agent's House (right) and the Textile Building at Laws Railroad Museum have undergone some renovations recently and are planning to be opened to the public later this spring or summer. Laws volunteers had a busy winter, adding rooms and repairing the buildings for the summer tourist season. File photos

"The replacement of the front porch is finished and the adjoining ramp has been completed," the newsletter states. "(A)lmost completed are the utility connections and plumbing hook-ups."

Once those projects are finished, volunteers will clean the inside of the building and paint. The Agent's House is scheduled to re-open to the public this spring.

"It was a long time coming but the old house is on its way to another 125 years," the newsletter states.

In addition to the improvements to the Agent's House, the Bishop Boy Scout Troop, working on two separate Eagle Scout projects for two different scout members, installed a new ramp on the Library Arts building and a new section of board walk in front of the Agent's House.

Laws volunteers are also looking forward to completing the two-year-long Textile Building project, which is scheduled for completion in June.

The large building has been divided into five rooms that house a beauty shop, millinery shop, living room scene with 1896 furniture, a room for rotating displays of vintage clothing and a storage and sorting room.

Volunteers working on the project have installed hardwood flooring and carpeting as well as simulated tin ceilings, wainscoting, vintage wallpaper, old-fashioned lighting and a wall in the entryway made of wood from the old Laws water tank.

Volunteers have also installed electric, heating and cooling and new cabinets in the storage and sorting room.

The only thing left before the Textile House is complete is the installation of large pavers along the front porch and setting up the display items.

A look at living history in the Laws train barn

Volunteers build facility to serve as maintenance area and display

By Mike Gervais
Register Staff

It takes a dedicated group of volunteers to maintain the historic displays at Laws Railroad Museum. Above, three volunteers stand in their train barn, a workshop and display at the museum. Photo by Mike Gervais

The Laws train barn serves as both a display for visitors and a work shop for the many volunteers who are dedicated to restoring antique locomotives for the musuem. Photo by Mike Gervais

Residents and visitors have an opportunity to see living history at the Laws Railroad Museum train barn where historical operating equipment is stored and local train buffs can often be found bringing antique locomotives to life.

Back in the mid 1990s, a group of train buffs at Laws decided they wanted to restore the Death Valley Brill car, a diesel-powered locomotive that had been sitting and deteriorating at the museum for several years.

The group decided that, before restoring the historic piece of equipment, the museum needed someplace where the men could work on the train and, more importantly, protect it from the elements when it is complete.

That's when the idea to build a train barn came about.

According to Paul Thompson, a Laws volunteer who was instrumental in getting the train barn built, the Owens Valley Railway Committee found three hay barns at Coso Junction that were deteriorating and unused.

Coso Operating Plant, which owned the property with the barns, gave the group permission to salvage materials, giving the train buffs almost everything they needed to build their barn.

"We went down there with a flatbed truck and took all the materials we could use, we took the beans, the metal panels and all the wood that was up there," Thompson said.

A series of old telephone poles made up the support structure for the walls of the barn, and the Laws volunteers took the same approach.

"Almost everything here came from those barns, the only new pieces are the roof tresses. Because modern engineering standards, we had to buy new tresses," Thompson said.

Laws applied for and was granted a $225,000 TEA grant that helped purchase materials for the train barn, Brill car, repairs on the Laws water tower and the reconstruction of the turntable.

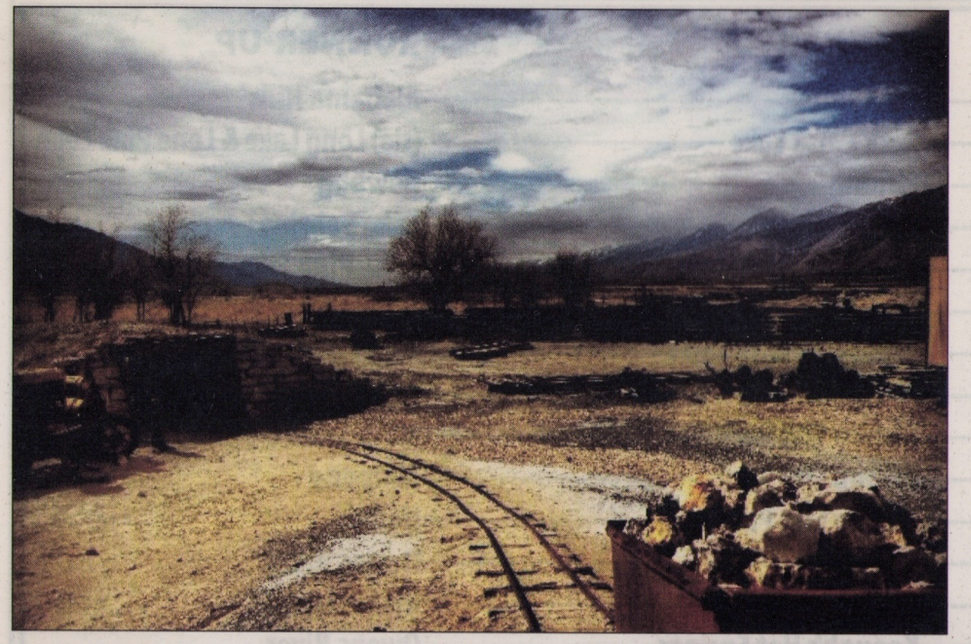
Construction began on the train barn in 1994 with about 10 Laws volunteers and crews from CalFire's CDF camp.

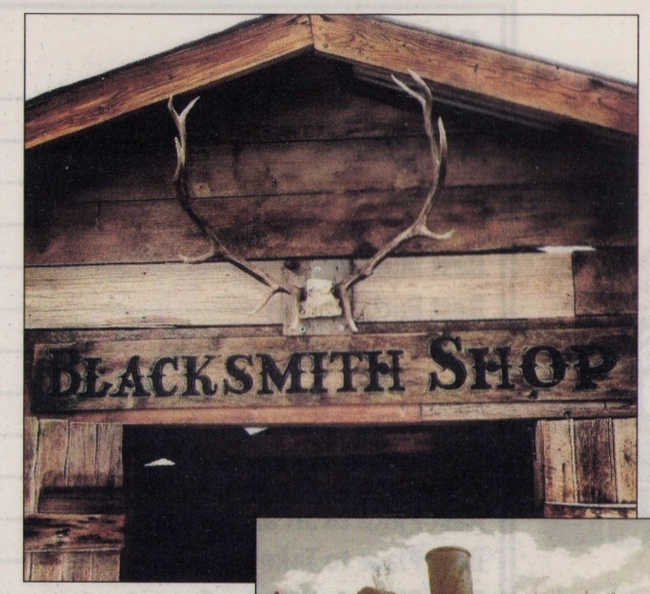
"Everybody who helped had their own specialty," Thompson said. "I did the electrical and Andy Pucio did the windows and things like that."

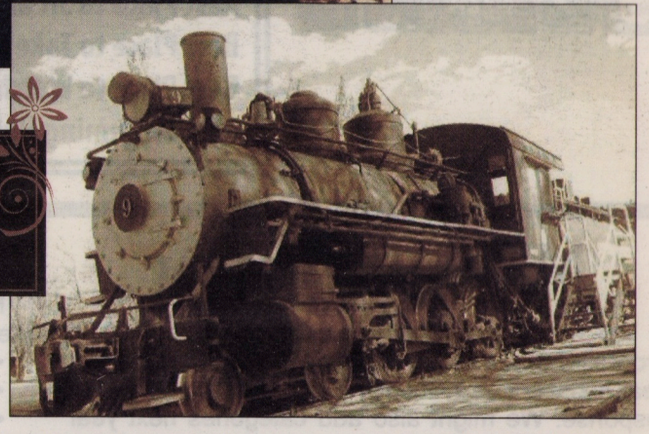
The CDF crews helped with some of the work in the rafters of the high barn.

"If it wasn't for CDF, we'd still be working on the building I think," Thompson said. "They brought 17-man crews and got a lot of work done for us."

Tracks were laid to allow Laws volunteers to move locomotives that need work into and out of the barn to be worked on or displayed on the grounds.







Laws Railroad Museum is home to the Slim Princess No. 9 (below), several authentic buildings, such as the Blacksmith Shop (left), and also several acres of land worth exploring as well (far left). **Photos by Jesse Steele**

Laws Railroad Museum: We choo-choo-choose you

Best Museum

By Jesse Steele 2013

Laws Museum President Jim Morrow said he would like to thank the people who voted for Laws as the Best Museum in Inyo County.

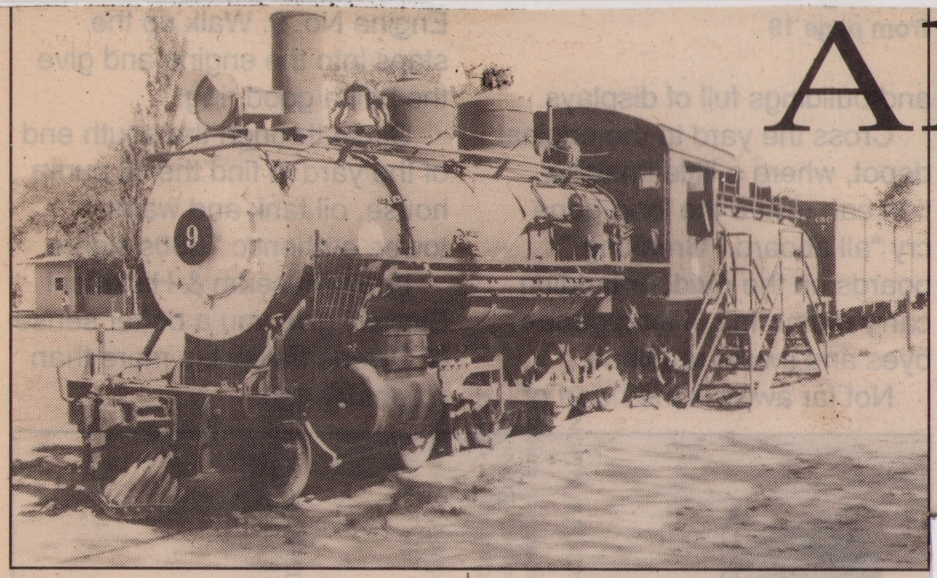
"We really treasure their thoughts about the museum and their appreciation. We like to know that it is as important to them, as it is to us. Everyone at the museum appreciates the small town community and surrounding areas. Small communities like ours really have an appreciation for the past and local history."

Nothing represents that notion more than the nationally-registered historic landmark known as Laws Railroad Museum, located off of U.S. 6 south of Bishop. Laws was founded in 1966 and has been a favorite of both locals and visitors from around the world ever since. "It has been on the circuit of places to stop in California since its induction," said Morrow. "We have 15,000 visitors annually and a quarter of them are tourists from other countries looking to have a glimpse into the American Old West." Recently, the L.A. Times did a story on Laws Museum and the publicity has brought with it a new group of tourists trekking to find that Old West feel.

Laws offers a little piece of the old local railroad, the Slim Princess, which operated throughout the valley beginning in 1880. According to Laws officials, when the railroad ceased to operate in 1959, most of the buildings were demolished except the train depot, agent's house, oil and water tanks and the turntable. These are still a part of the museum today. All of the other buildings were donated to the museum and moved there. Laws has been re-created to portray a small community complete with a doctor's office, post office, newspaper office, general store, blacksmith and fire station. Each building is filled with gifts and donations to the museum. From books and yearbooks for the old school house and library, to antique furniture and vintage clothing, they all add to the atmosphere of the old buildings. The restored brill car is a hit and is available for rides at certain times of the year.

Laws is favored by local residents who enjoy everything from being able to take a stroll around the 11-acre museum and its exhibits, to having a picnic lunch on the grass on a sunny day. The grounds are used regularly for weddings, photo shoots, films and even concerts. Every year, Laws Museum holds a fundraising concert at the depot building. The museum had more than 100 people in the audience this past June for The Black Irish Band out of Sonora. Organizers have invited the band back this June and would love to double the numbers.

Another big event for Laws is the annual Good Ole Days celebration, slated for Sept. 7. Laws is turned into a functioning Old West town with demonstrations of old time crafts and jobs. Participants are encouraged to dress in period-specific clothing and enjoy the local bands and food as well as the wagon and train rides.



All aboard!

Laws Museum in Bishop is a straight track to Owens Valley history

Recreation may be the justifiable king in the Eastern Sierra, but tapping into local history is gaining more and more converts. Learning about these ties to the past can be just as relaxing and rewarding, and often more surprising!

A good start is the Laws Railroad Museum & Historical Site, just north of Bishop. This official state and national historic landmark is a charming place to hop aboard a steam engine or wander the boardwalk of an old valley town. Here is the original 1883 depot of the Carson & Colorado Railroad. A hand-pushed turntable that used people-power to turn the engines around for another run down the valley. Numerous Old West-style buildings that were once props for a Hollywood movie. Historical collections of Native American artifacts, farm equipment, bottles and more.

The Carson & Colorado Railroad, or C & C, brought the outside world to Owens Valley in 1883 and kept at it for almost 80 years, until its final run in 1960. Spurred by the great silver strikes of western Nevada and the promise of more at Cerro Gordo in Inyo County, the C & C linked Eastern Sierra mines, mills and ranches to the goldfields and growing cities of Nevada by way of Montgomery Pass. The line was called the "Slim Princess," so named for its narrow gauge rails and presumably regal presence. No doubt anything that brought remote Owens Valley closer to civilization was treated royally.

The "Carson" part of its name made sense, linking with the Virginia & Truckee near Carson City, but the "Colorado" part never played out; a slump in the price of silver doomed such a vast line through such remote territory. In her book *Deepest Valley,* Eastern Sierra writer and historian Genny Smith notes the words of C & C financier D. O. Mills, who upon inspecting his new railroad remarked, "Gentlemen, we either built it 300 miles too long or 300 years too soon."

Those 300 miles pushed the line to Keeler, a then-bustling port town on the shores of now-dry Owens Lake. In the late 1800s, Keeler was the staging point for shipping silver bullion from the Cerro Gordo workings by way of ferry boats to waiting mule trains in Olancha. But by the time the C & C was completed to Owens Lake, Cerro Gordo was played out. The railroad continued to carry Owens Valley crops and hay to the western Nevada mining towns, which kept the railroad afloat.

Southern Pacific bought the line in 1900 and got lucky immediately when gold strikes at Tonopah paid for the purchase. During the 1900s, however, trucking became a more economical means of hauling freight. And passenger traffic gravitated to the highway as well, for it ran through the towns on the west side of the valley, three miles away from the train stations built to serve the east side's promised ore hauls. A mile at a time the narrow-gauge track was foregone.

The final run of the Laws-Keeler line in 1960 marked the end of an era in Owens Valley, and west of the Rocky Mountains for that matter, for no other narrow-gauge public carrier remained. In the valley, a parallel track — Scenic 395 —

Local citizens turn out for the dedication of El Camino Sierra (the future Highway 395) in 1910. It was sponsored by the Good Roads Club which promoted decent roads for the growing popularity of the automobile. This image is part of a photo taken with a 360-degree panoramic camera.

Photo by Andrew Forbes, courtesy Laws Museum

Laws Museum: Honoring the 50th year of the archives

7-16-2016

PAM VAUGHAN
COLUMNIST

When current director of the Laws Museum and Historic Site, Barbara Moss, was hired, Alice Boothe was in charge. On Barbara's first day, Alice waved her hand toward the archive vault and said, "There are the files. You might want to get familiar with them."

There are currently thousands of files at Laws. And probably millions of photographs, negatives, maps, documents and primary sources. It's a local researcher's dream and ordeal.

It's the museum's 50th anniversary this year and the repository has been enlarged throughout these years. In the beginning, the Visitors Center was in the depot, and all the archival materials had to be carted home daily for safekeeping. After the crew of the movie, "Nevada Smith," built the movie set, one of the set buildings became the new Visitors Center. A fireproof archive was designed by Howard Holland, and he showed the plans to Lefty Irwin who added this concrete addition.

Alice Boothe, Lillian Edell and Thelma Gibbons were early contributors and organizers of the photos and files such as the Pioneer Files. In these portfolios, one can find family documents, images and newspaper clippings. These old valley family files are frequently used for genealogical research by people from all over the country. Over the years, there have been volunteers who have diligently spent hundreds of hours working in and organizing the "vault" as it is known. One of them was Mary Lou Martin who made sure all the Bishop Union High School yearbooks were housed and she kept track of all the graduates.

There is an extensive obituary collection from *The Inyo Register*. The old editions of the *Inyo Independent* and *The Inyo Register* are in bound volumes, which is a miracle considering that many years ago, a new *Register* editor decided to throw all these tomes in the dumpster. Barbara Ferry Laughon, according to legend, climbed in said dumpsters and rescued the volumes. She called Howard Holland, and he put out the SOS. About four guys showed up in their pickups and hauled them to Laws for safekeeping. There were also the Bridgeport newspapers, which were sent to the museum in Bridgeport. These newspapers at Laws are now a major research tool for local history and it is so easy getting sidetracked by juicey old tidbits while trying to find what you need.

Researching in the archive is stepping back in time and there are photos from the earliest days of northern Inyo County. There are two main sections to the photo files. The first one is of Bishop. The other larger collection is of Inyo and Mono counties. The photos have come from donations by various individuals over the years, including Enid Larsen, Russ and Ann Johnson, C. Lorin Ray and others. The museum is very proud to have all of Curt Phillips' negatives and prints and the negative collection of Harry Mendenhall. The museum also has original photos by Dorothea Lange, A.A. Forbes, Burton Frasher and Stephen Willard.

On a personal note, I've worked in the archive for several years and find it engrossing. But I have developed two pet peeves. The first one is that I often hear of people throwing out old photos; their families didn't bother to identify these images. The other issue is that some of the old photographs from the valley are sold on EBay and leave the valley. There goes our visual history!

Monetary donations rarely come to help the archive, but recently, former resident, Alicia Powell, gave a substantial donation in her will to help preserve the archive. The museum will be forever grateful.

If you are interested in researching in the archives, there is a minimal fee for the research and photocopying.

(Pam Vaughan is the photo archivist at the Laws Museum. She and her husband, Brendan, are the authors of "Images of America: Bishop." Pam taught high school history for 37 years and was the recipient of Fulbright and National Endowment for the Humanities grants. She is the great-granddaughter of Owens Valley pioneers.)

Welcome to Laws (facing page top) Don on the Rails (middle) Checking out one of the historic buildings (bottom) The Slim Princess

LAWS RAILROAD

BISHOP'S HIDDEN GEM

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPH BY SARAH MOREY

Four miles southeast of Bishop on U.S. Route 6 you will find a hidden jewel known as the Laws Railroad Museum. Celebrating 50 years as a museum this year this property will transport you back in time.

When you arrive at the museum the first building you will see is the Laws Railroad Station Depot. Formerly known as the Bishop Creek Station, the town of Laws saw its beginning back in 1883 as a stop on the Carson & Colorado Railroad. The railroad was originally to run from Mound House, NV and the Carson River to the Colorado River. Thus it was known as the C&C Railroad. Never reaching the Colorado River it was often referred to as "the railroad that was built 300 miles too long or 300 years too soon."

The town of Laws began to form around the Depot. Before long, Bishop Creek Station became a hub for transporting agricultural products for the local farmers and ore from the processing mill in Keeler. Soon you could find a barber, a boarding house, restaurant, hotel and a dance hall. Homes cropped up, a general store and blacksmith shop.

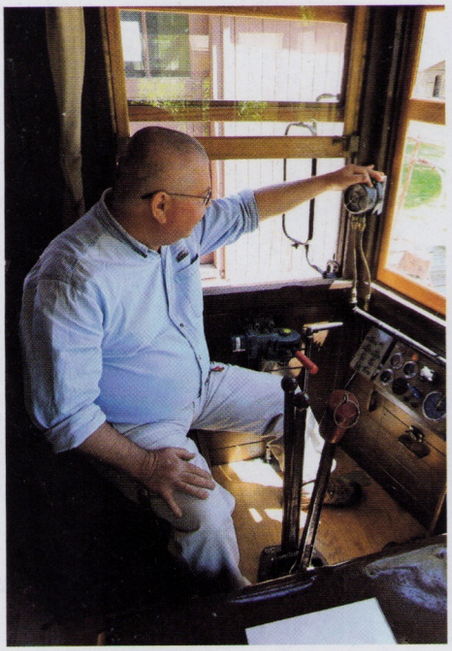
From 1883 until 1960 the C&C Railroad operated and maintained the narrow track that connected Mound House with towns in the Owens Valley. In 1900 the Southern Pacific Railroad purchased the C&C Railroad and renamed the station Laws in honor of R.J. Laws, a railroad official. As mining operations slowed and eventually shut down the railroad no longer was needed and the Southern Pacific Railroad shut down the Laws depot in 1959. This is when citizens of Laws began to pack up and leave. Once the final run was made on the narrow gauge tracks the town of Laws was pretty much a ghost town.

Not long after, the City of Bishop and Inyo County recognized the historical significance of this area and moved to establish a railroad museum. Around that same time a movie company wanted to use Laws as a site for their production. This production was called "Nevada Smith" and starred Steve McQueen. The producers of the film helped to restore some of the buildings and built new structures for their set. The same time this film was released the Laws Railroad Museum opened, in April of 1966.

Today when you visit the museum you will not only see the original buildings from Laws and the film production but several buildings from the area that were marked for destruction. Seeing their historical value they were moved to the Laws Railroad Museum property. The buildings are set up around the Depot to create a village atmosphere. Each building has historical artifacts of the time. There is an old general store, library, schoolhouse and church among others. As you step into each of these buildings things from the past surround you. The sights and smells take you back. It is a wonderful experience.

Outside on the grounds one of the centerpieces of the Laws Museum is the "Slim Princess," Southern Pacific Locomotive No. 9. Some speculate that it got its name from running on the narrow gauge tracks. The tracks were only 36" apart, whereas typical tracks were at least 48" apart. The "Slim Princess" ran passenger service until 1932 and freight until 1960.

Another jewel on the museum grounds is the self-propelled Death Valley Car. Although this car did not travel on the tracks through Laws it did transport freight and eventually passengers a couple hundred miles away in Death Valley. As mining was on the decline in Death Valley, the Pacific Coast Borax Company, which had claims in the area, started a tourism business to bring in additional income. Motor Car No.5 was built in 1927, a Brill model 55, which is only one of four remaining in the United States. The motorcar carried passengers and small freight through the beautiful scenery of Death Valley Junction and Ryan. In 1931 the Death Valley



No. 5 Pressure Check

Dallas ringing the Bell

Washing the No. 5

Then & Now Death Valley Car

(top) The Depot (middle) The Ranch House (bottom) The Bottle House

Railroad was abandoned when Pacific Coast Borax closed its remaining mines. The car was then purchased by the U.S. Potash Company in the early 1930s and moved to Carlsbad, NM. The motorcar was used to transport mill workers to job sites for almost 25 years.

After being abandoned, New Mexico donated the car to the Laws Railroad Museum on November 27, 1967. Over the next two decades it was painstakingly restored. Today you can ride the Brill Motor Car for a small fee and experience a ride that includes an educational and entertaining history talk by one of the volunteer conductors.

The Bishop Museum and Historical Society run this beautiful property. You will see dedicated volunteers at every corner brimming with knowledge and enthusiasm and Board Members working on the grounds and washing the trains.

So next time you are down this way, take U.S. Route 6 to the Laws Museum and step back in time. This property is truly an experience for all ages and one you won't soon forget! SH

When you go

Start your tour at the visitor center. Admission is free but donations are appreciated. The museum is open from 10am to 4pm, seven days a week. The Brill #5 rides start on Memorial Day weekend and run most holidays through Labor Day weekend. The visitor center has a good selection of literature, souvenirs, light snacks and water. The nearest place to buy food or gas is in Bishop. There are many special activities throughout the season so check their site for the latest updates.

Laws Railroad Museum and Historic Site
PO Box 363
Bishop, CA 93515
760.873.5950
www.lawsmuseum.org

The Slim Princess appears ready for service at Laws Museum.

Laws Good Ole Days

Jim Morrow, a Laws Railroad Museum volunteer, pulls the museum's diesel locomotive out of the train barn Friday morning as he prepares it for the annual Good Ole Days event 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. today at the museum. The locomotive, used underground in the Union Carbide Pine Creek mining operation, will be running today to give free rides in the attached Pine Creek mine first aid car.

9-10-2016

Photo by Mike Chacanaca

Slim Princess could be chugging to Durango

1-9-2017

Railroad group actively raising funds for historic journey

By Terrance Vestal
Managing Editor

1-19-2017

For Dave Mull, president of the Carson and Colorado Railway organization and its members, it's "Durango or bust."

Mull and his group have been invited to bring Inyo County's Slim Princess Engine No. 18 to the 37th Annual National Narrow Gauge Convention. The convention is held in Denver but features narrow gauge railroad rides from Durango, Colo., to Silverton, Colo.

This historic railroad has been in continuous operation since 1882, according to the railroad's website.

"It's a really exciting opportunity for our little locomotive," Mull said Wednesday.

Crowds gathered in Dehy Park in Independence on Oct. 15, 2016, to witness the Slim Princess No. 18 come back to life.

Inyo County acquired the Slim Princess No. 18 in 1955 and Mull said he has been working on the locomotive since 1997.

The restoration project of Engine No. 18 got its official start in 2010 when volunteers from the Owens Valley and several historic railroad organizations throughout the West came together to begin the process of putting the locomotive, which had been on display at Dehy Park in Independence since the 1950s, back to operational order.

In October of last year at Dehy Park, several hundred people gathered to witness the narrow gauge locomotive's steam boiler fired up, hear its train whistle blow and witness the magnificent iron horse of Owens Valley's yesteryear move under its own head of steam for the first time in 62 years.

Mull said he believes the Slim Princess is the only operational Southern Pacific narrow gauge engine in the country.

See ENGINE ▶ Page 5

Continued from front page

The locomotive ultimately will be housed at the Larry Peckham Memorial Engine House, currently under construction behind the Eastern California Museum. Peckham, Mull said, donated generously toward the locomotive's restoration and the construction of the engine house.

About three weeks ago, Mull said his organization was contacted by the organizers of the convention and asked about participating.

Because the locomotive belongs to the county, Mull made a presentation to county supervisors regarding the opportunity to participate in the Durango event.

The event is set to run from Aug. 30 through Sept. 2.

"We see this as an opportunity for the locomotive to be an ambassador for Inyo County," Mull said.

The plan, Mull said, would be to bring the Slim Princess down to Durango to double check the restoration work.

There also could be an opportunity for the Slim Princess to pull three "revenue trains," which would generate funds toward recouping the cost of the trip.

Mull said he estimates, with the cost of the insurance, getting the Slim Princess to Durango and back will cost about $35,000.

To that end, the group is actively raising money to make the trip. Those interested can make a donation through the group's website at carsoncolorado.com under the membership/store tab or email carsoncolorado18@yahoo.com.

"I've done the trip numerous times," Mull said of the Durango-Silverton run. "At one point, you're 500 feet over the Animas River on a ledge and when you look down, you're looking directly at the river."

The Durango-Silverton run is about 62 miles long, which compares to the about 62 yards the locomotive traveled in October, as Inyo County Fourth District Supervisor and Chairman Mark Tillemans said during Tuesday's meeting.

While $35,000 might seem like a lot of money to raise before the trip, Mull said the group in five years raised $180,000 for the restoration effort.

"And that was all $5, $10, $20 donations from individuals," Mull said. "Every now and then we would get a larger donation."

The Carson and Colorado Railway is a non-profit organization with about 350 members.

← Robert Larson Sr.

Laws museum memorial 1992

Back on track

7-4-2017

Crowds gathered around at the Eastern California Museum Monday to celebrate as the Carson and Colorado Railway and the Eastern California Museum hosted the Slim Princess Engine 18 Silver Spike Celebration. The locomotive was steamed up and run on the newest "short-line" railroad in Inyo County, which consists of about 300 feet of narrow gauge demonstration track coming out of the Larry Peckham Engine house at the museum.

Photo by Jon Klusmire

Getting the Slim Princess back on track – Carson and Colorado

Community Group of the Year

By Register Staff

Several hundred people gathered on the grounds of the Eastern California Museum Monday, July 3, for the dedication of the Larry Peckham Memorial Engine House, the new permanent home of the fully restored Union Pacific Engine 18, The Slim Princess. The narrow gauge steam locomotive was steamed up and rolled out of the barn prior to the "Silver Spike Ceremony." Dave Mull, president of the non-profit Carson and Colorado Railway, the group that took five years to restore the locomotive, drove in the ceremonial spike.

Because of its dedication to restoring an integral part of Inyo County history, the Carson and Colorado Railway group has been named Community Group of the Year.

When a group of local wrench-twisters and railroad fans said five years ago that they were going to completely overhaul the hulking, old, somewhat rusty Slim Princess locomotive, the reactions were mixed, at best.

"Umm, really?"

"You can actually do that?"

"You've never worked on a steam locomotive, right?"

"That sounds like sort of a pricey deal, if you can even do it."

Last fall, some of the original organizers of the non-profit Carson and Colorado Railway stood in Dehy Park in Independence with some of their new best friends. They opened the pop-up tent that had been the

Photo courtesy Eastern California Museum

Dave Mull, of Lone Pine, gets ready to drive the ceremonial spiked during the July 3 dedication of the Larry Peckham Memorial Engine House on the grounds of the Eastern California Museum in Independence, the new permanent home of the fully restored Union Pacific Engine 18, The Slim Princess. The fully restored, operational narrow gauge steam locomotive, in the background, ran down the track to the cheers and applause of several hundred spectators.

Photo courtesy Eastern California Museum

Hundreds people gathered on the grounds of the Eastern California Museum July 3, 2017, for the dedication of the Larry Peckham Memorial Engine House, the new permanent home of the fully restored Union Pacific Engine 18, The Slim Princess. The narrow gauge steam locomotive was steamed up and rolled out of the barn prior to the "Silver Spike Ceremony."

home of the No. 18 engine for years. They fired it up. The big engine, all 89,200 pounds of black steel and shiny brass, rolled down a temporary track under its own steam power.

The reactions were not mixed.

Grins as big as the engine's boiler were plastered on every face. Handshakes and high fives and hugs followed.

But the celebration was short-lived.

There was more work to do.

Old-fashioned hard work has been the calling card of the Carson and Colorado Railway group since they started the rather audacious effort to bring back to life a locomotive celebrating its 115th birthday as a living, steaming reminder of the Owens Valley's rich railroading history.

The Carson and Colorado group, headed by Independence resident Dave Mull with a large supporting cast, took a slow and steady approach to the engine restoration project. They first got permission from the engine's owner, Inyo County, to work on the big chunk of iron.

At first glance, it looked pretty grim. The Slim Princess arrived in Dehy Park in the 1960s. It was donated to the county by Southern Pacific, which had retired the Princess as working engine in 1954. The narrow-gauge engine, which was built in 1911, came to the Owens Valley in 1928 and was operated by Southern Pacific, which had taken over the original Carson & Colorado route from Keeler to Nevada, then only from Keeler to Laws.

The work and the fundraising begin in earnest when the big white tent covered the engine. Under the direction of Randy Babcock, a vice president of the Carson and Colorado Railroad and the roundhouse foreman for the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, volunteer crews descended at least once a month and started tearing into the engine. Literally. Parts and pieces were shipped to railroad shops and restoration outfits across the West, were refurbished and shipped back and put back on the Slim Princess.

Financial help came from some grants and large donations but mostly came from selling T-shirts and hats and hundreds of small donations and a bunch of fundraisers, many featuring Mull's famous "trash can tri-tip" roasts. Through the years, more than $100,000 fueled the restoration effort.

The group was scrupulous about informing its supporters of the progress being made and making sure donations were put to work on the restoration job.

The group recently completed construction the Larry Pecham Engine House on the grounds of the Eastern California Museum in Independence. With matching funds from the Friends of the Eastern California Museum and the Museum/Inyo County, the new home of the Slim Princess was completed in time for the Fourth of July celebration in Independence.

And after that, history was made once again.

In September, the Slim Princess once again graced the narrow gauge tracks at Laws. The big engine made a run on the rail line at Laws for the first time in 63 years, during the "Slim Princess Reunion."

One can't help but smile at the sight of a steam locomotive moving on its home tracks once again.

Slim Princess comes home

Engine No. 18 moved to Eastern California museum grounds

Register Staff 6-22-2017

The Slim Princess locomotive was on the road, and the sight of a full-size steam locomotive rolling down U.S. Highway 395 drew quite a crowd.

The fully refurbished narrow-gauge locomotive was loaded on a semi-truck trailer on June 9 and hauled from its longtime perch in Dehy Park in Independence to its new home in the recently constructed Larry Peckham Engine House at the Eastern California Museum.

Residents of Independence and surprised visitors and passersby stopped to watch the all-volunteer crew from the Carson and Colorado Railway lay down temporary track that was used to roll the 22-ton locomotive to the trailer. The large semi-tow truck from Miller Towing in Lone Pine winched the engine onto the trailer. Once secured, the rig rolled down U.S. Highway 395 and then up Onion Valley Road and deposited the Slim Princess at its new engine house.

In a way, the very public move of Engine No. 18 represented history repeating itself. In 1955, Southern Pacific donated the engine to Inyo County. A group of volunteers built the short run of track in Dehy Park. The locomotive arrived on the back of a truck. As an appreciative crowd watched, the engine was placed on the track. It remained a well-known landmark and anchor of Dehy Park for the next 62 years.

Before it was retired to the park, the Slim Princess had quite a work history. The narrow-gauge engine, which was built in 1911, came to the Owens Valley in 1928 and was operated by Southern Pacific, which had taken over the original Carson & Colorado route from Keeler to Nevada. In later years, the route was shortened to just Keeler to Laws. The steam locomotive was replaced by a diesel electric engine in 1955.

The move to the museum grounds represents one of the final steps in the successful effort to restore the engine to fully operating condition. The non-profit Carson and Colorado group has spent the last five years working to get the locomotive running. After firing it up late last year, the group obtained all the relevant state and federal permits to operate the engine.

Volunteers, including numerous professional steam engine and locomotive mechanics and engineers, put in thousands of hours of work on the engine. Financial help came from some grants and large donations, but mostly came from selling

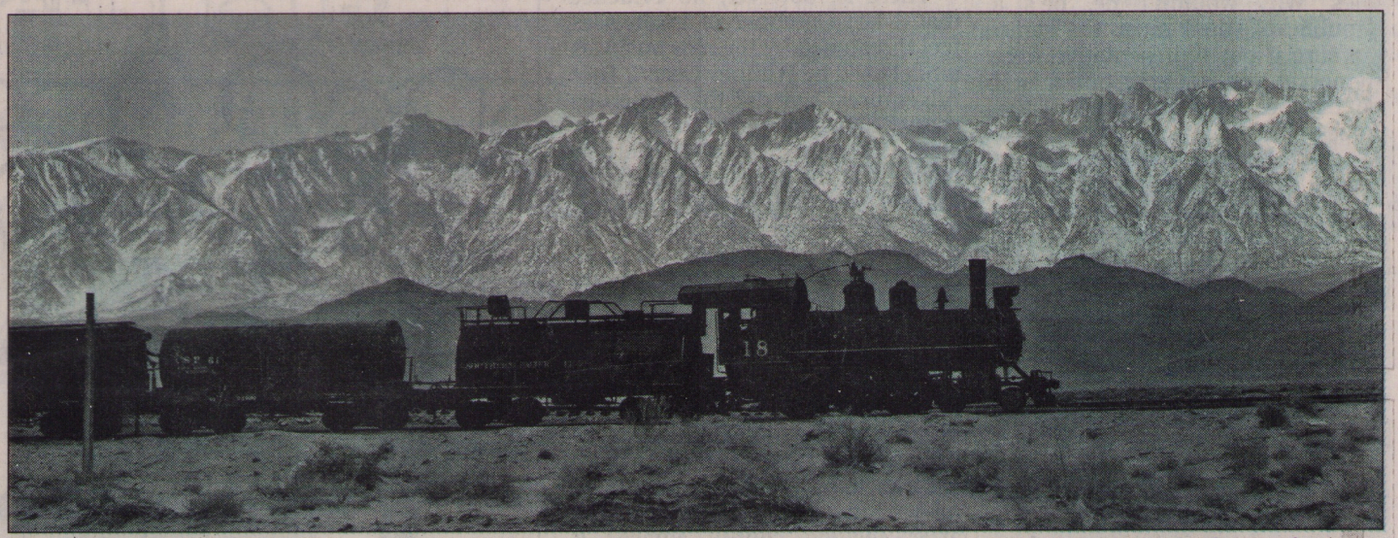
See TRAIN ▶ Page 3

The Slim Princess traveled by truck up Onion Valley Road to her new home at the Eastern California Museum.

Photo courtesy Eastern California Museum

Southern Pacific Engine No. 18 rests on the short stretch of track at the Eastern California Museum.

Photos courtesy Eastern California Museum



Southern Pacific Engine No. 18 during her heyday traveled through southern Owens Valley with Mt. Whitney in the background.

TRAIN

Continued from front page

t-shirts and hats and hundreds of small donations and fundraisers. Over the years, more than $100,000 was raised to fuel the restoration effort.

Another group of large donations from the Friends of the Eastern California Museum, Carson and Colorado, and the Museum/Inyo County funded construction of the Larry Peckam Engine House on the grounds of the Eastern California Museum.

The locomotive will get an official dedication on Monday July 3, during the Slim Princess Engine No. 18 Silver Spike Celebration. The locomotive will be steamed up around noon, and the final "spike" will be ceremoniously driven on the 300-foot length of track on the museum grounds. Visitors will be able to take an up close look at the locomotive and talk to the engineers and mechanics who rebuilt her.

The Idle Hands Bluegrass Band will perform starting at about 4 p.m., and there will be a fundraising tri-tip dinner on the museum grounds, at 155 N. Grant Street in Independence. Please RSVP for the dinner by calling (760) 878-0258, or going online at https://tinyurl.com/ku9nkm3.

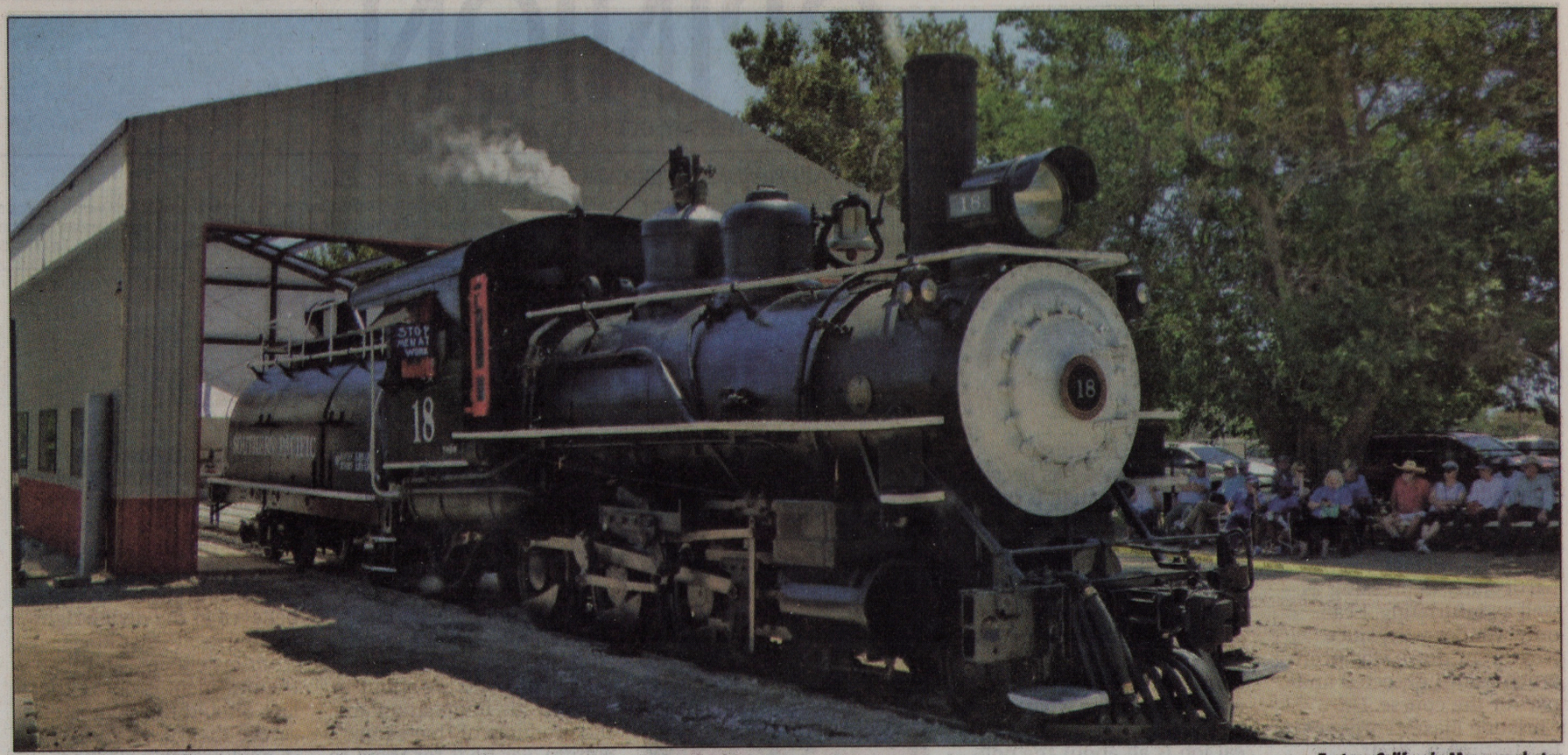
The Carson & Colorado Railway (CCR) is an all-volunteer 501(c)3 non-profit group dedicated to the restoration, and eventual operation of Southern Pacific narrow gauge locomotive No. 18, as a living reminder of the proud history of Independence and Southern Inyo County.

For more information, and the group's latest newsletter, check www.carsoncolordo.com.

2½ minutes.

By Dr. Mark Hodges of Caltech's Owens Valley Radio Observatory

REFERRING THE QUALITY CAREGIVERS YOU NEED AT A RATE YOU CAN AFFORD
Servicing Inyo & Mono Counties.

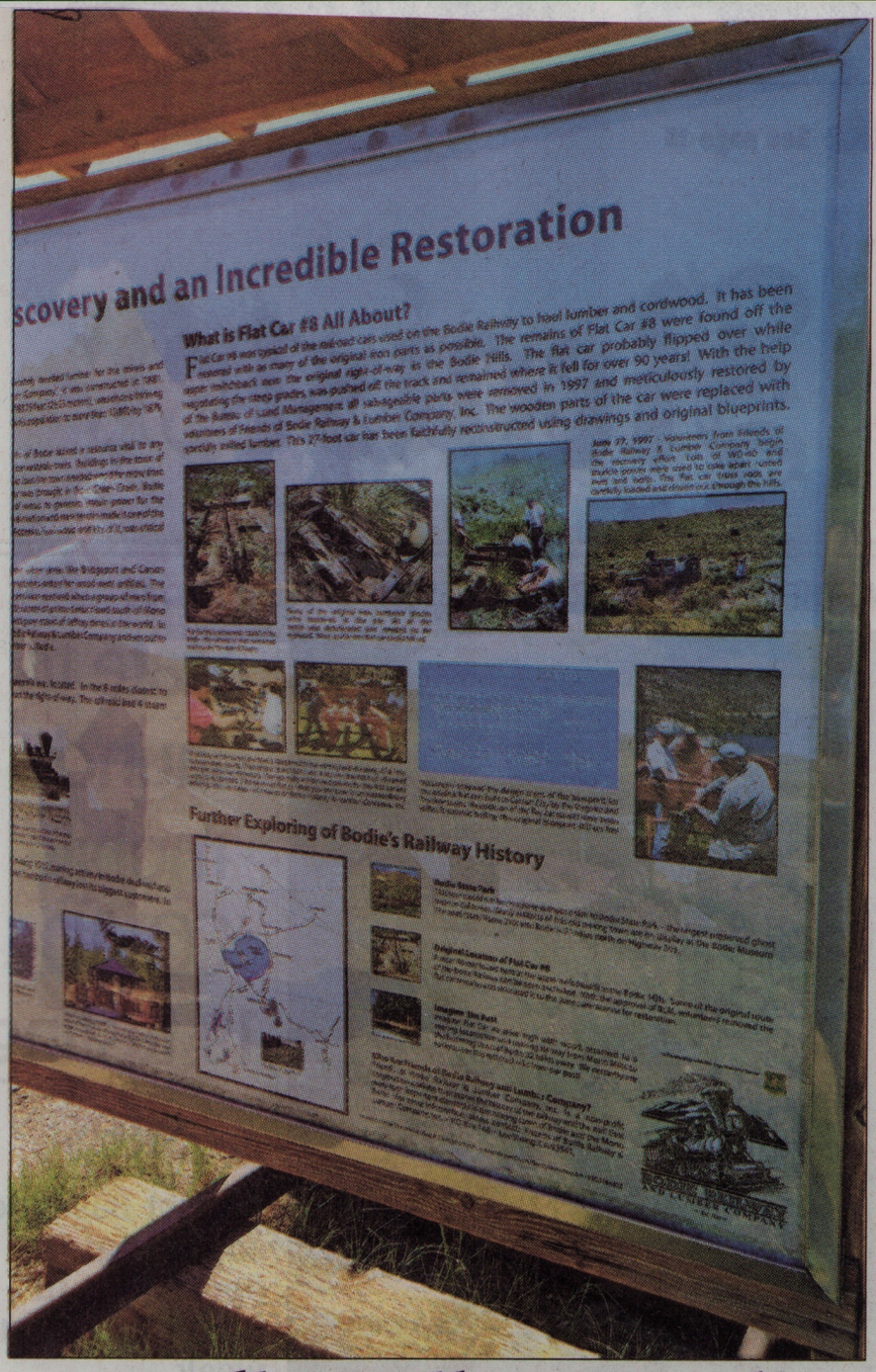


In July 2017, the Slim Princess made her inaugural run out of the Larry Peckham Engine House at the Eastern California Museum.

Eastern California Museum photos

The restoration job on the Slim Princess included detailing and restoring all aspects of the steam locomotive, which ran from Laws to Keeler until being retired in 1954.

Locomotive No. 18, the Slim Princess, steaming up for the short run of track at the Eastern California Museum in Independence. The engine will be running on Friday, Oct. 5.



Bodie Railway and Lumber Company kiosk installation

2020

The Bodie Railway and Lumber Company Flat Car No. 8, currently on loan from the Bodie Foundation and on display at Laws Railroad Museum and Historical Site, now has a newly installed information kiosk telling about the history of the car, its rescue, and restoration. The tempered glass covering the display board was donated by Bishop Glass, and the metal frame was donated by Dean's Plumbing sheet metal shop. Both donations together with the covered kiosk will help to preserve the pictures and story about the Flat Car No. 8. Museum staff extends a big "thank you" to these local businesses for their help with this display – "as soon as we can re-open, come on out and visit us."

AT THE LAWS RAILROAD MUSEUM AND HISTORICAL SITE SEE....

CARSON & COLORADO

WHY PRESERVE LAWS?

Because of its historic and sentimental value as it pertains to early development of the Owens Valley and the eastern Sierra region.

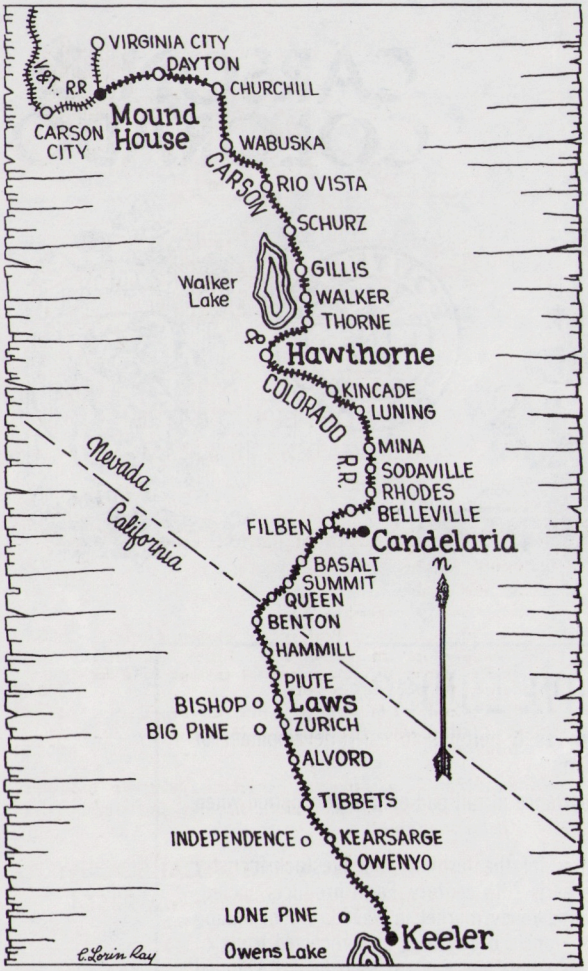
Because of its historic and sentimental importance in railroad annals of a period when the "Great West" was being won.

Laws was once an important outfitting center for the farming and livestock industry as well as being a mining center during the early 20th century. Farm products, including livestock, poultry, hay, wool and honey, found ready market in Nevada boom mining camps of that day. Larger markets in the San Francisco Bay area also received fruits of the industrial efforts of the residents of Owens Valley and Eastern Nevada—all shipped from Laws via the Narrow Gauge.

Laws was also the delivery point for merchandise from the outside required by these residents and businesses. The Mina (Nev.) to Keeler Branch of the Carson and Colorado (narrow gauge) was originally built to serve the mines of the area, and ores and minerals consigned to outside smelters were an important part of the cargo. At that time shipping on the narrow gauge was the only means of transportation for the Eastern Sierra region. The railroad was the life link from the outside serving Eastern California and Western Nevada.

THE LAWS-KEELER BRANCH of the Southern Pacific was the last operating narrow gauge public carrier west of the Rocky Mts. and **LAWS** was the northern terminus for many years.

NOTE: In addition to the Depot Building, (built in 1883) many items of interest used in railroading during the 1880's and later are to be found on the **LAWS** site. The **LAWS RAILROAD MUSEUM** is expanding as additional items are being returned that once were a part of the Narrow Gauge operations.



GIFT DEED

In appreciation of the interest of Inyo County and the City of Bishop in preserving the memory of the Far West's last common carrier narrow-gauge railroad, the Keeler Branch, Southern Pacific Company is pleased to donate steam locomotive No. 9 together with other rolling stock, and the Laws Station building and surrounding installations for safekeeping in behalf of generations to come.

Chronology In Brief . . .

INCORPORATED MAY 10, 1880.

FEB. 1882—Railroad completed from Mound House to Candaleria, Nev.

JAN. 1883—Completed to Benton, Calif.

MAR. 1883—Completed to Laws—first train run Apr. 1.

JULY, 1883—Completed to Hawley (Keeler). Train service initiated in August.

FEB. 1892—Carson & Colorado "Railway" Co. incorporated to consolidate three divisions and to refinance previous corp.

MAR. 1900—C & C sold to S. P. for $2,750,000. R. J. Laws for whom station was named retained as Supt.

JULY 1905—Tracks from Mound House to Tonopah Jct. standard gauged (145 mi.). Hawthorne, Nev. founded by C & C in 1881 by-passed. Shops moved to Mina.

AUG. 1905—Standard gauge to Tonopah completed. N. G. abandoned.

SEPT. 1905—Mountain Time for N. G. adopted.

FEB. 1908—Construction started on S. P. "Jawbone Branch" standard gauge road, Mojave to Owenyo, jct. point with N. G. Keeler to Laws Branch.

OCT. 1910—"Jawbone Branch" completed—used principally to haul equipment and supplies for building Owens Valley Aqueduct (City of Los Angeles)—first direct railroad service south out of Owens Valley.

JAN. 1912—Nev. & Calif. Ry. Corp. (C & C) dissolved and N. G. assumed Southern Pacific designation.

JUNE 1913—Overnight Pullman sleeper service inaugurated between Owenyo and L. A. over "Jawbone Branch". Business conducted from Owenyo office.

1932—Passenger service through Laws abondoned.

1943—Mina to Laws freight service abandoned and track removed.

JAN. 1959—S. P. announces application for ICC permission to discontinue N. G. Keeler to Laws branch (the last narrow gauge common carrier west of the Rocky Mts.) Permission later granted.

REASON: "declining and unpredictable use of line"—"expensive and time consuming transfer of shipments between narrow gauge (small sized cars) and standard gauge cars"— "Action unavoidable though regrettable from a sentimental point of view". S. P. expressed a "great affection for the unique branch line which dates from 1883 and appreciates the warm regard for the line by oldtime residents and a host of railroad hobbyists. However, the little railroad with its 36 inch gauge and tiny cars is an anachronism which can no longer be justified as an efficient operation".

FEB. 1959—Laws Agency discontinued and depot closed.

APRIL 30, 1960—Final day of operation of narrow gauge between Laws and Keeler. Locomotive No. 9 (a ten wheel Baldwin built in 1909) together with a string of cars, Laws Station Building and surrounding railroad installations formally transferred by the S. P. jointly to the City of Bishop and County of Inyo in form of a "Gift Deed". Thus ended the story of "The Slim Princess" as a living, moving part of railroad history. It is now legend.

JULY 6, 1964—Actual transfer of land (app. 11 acres) do-

In Memory of the "Slim Princess"

Doubtless there are none of us who know from whence came the name "Slim Princess". Some thought from the slim rails that extended over the 300 miles, but to most the name was accepted for the sentiment it bore.

Since that day in April 1960, when the last train arrived at Laws, there were those who dreamed of preserving the site, against adverse conditions. It now appears the program of preservation and restoration is at hand.

There are those who have passed the station, occupied with their thoughts, and scarcely giving it a glance. They were in the minority. Among the others were: the retired engineer who stood by Old No. 9 remembering the day his hand was on the throttle . . . the elderly couple who stopped to recall the day a youthful bride-to-be was met at the station . . . a former valley rancher from a piece down the track whose thoughts included days of long ago when the little engine whistled his milk cows off the tracks . . . the ex-sheepman paused to let his mind drift back to when he had loaded sheep at this site for shipment to northern markets . . . the salesman, banker and miner who had stepped down from the coach after a long hot ride, to take their place in a new community . . . the soldier who had waved goodbye as he departed for the war and many, many others who would be pleased if the depot and "Slim Princess" could be retained for future generations to view and enjoy.

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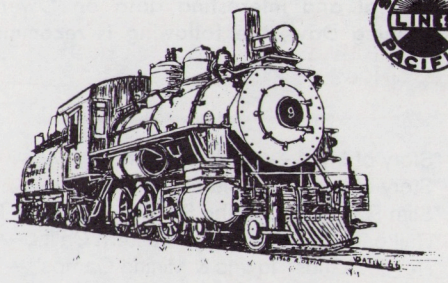
nated by S. P. to Inyo County. Deed accepted by Bd. of Supervisors. Recorded in official records Inyo County Vol. 165, page 78.

JAN. 1965—County of Inyo, City of Bishop, negotiated an Agreement with Bishop Museum and Historical Society to take over Laws site as Headquarters with permission to operate a Museum under certain conditions mutually agreed upon.

APRIL 1, 1966—LAWS RAILROAD MUSEUM opened to the public 83 years from the day the first scheduled train arrived at Laws from the north, complete with U. S. Mail, Wells Fargo Express and baggage cars, and offering both passenger and freight service.



WAYS OF HELPING IN THE RESTORATION PROGRAM

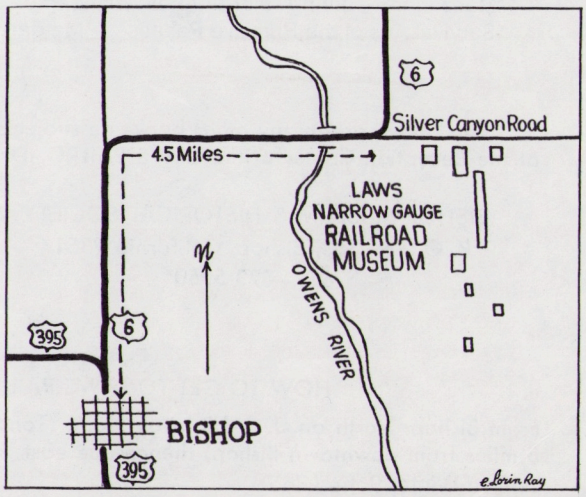
BY SPECIAL DONATIONS
BY MEMBERSHIPS

Schedule of Annual Dues

Individual Membership (Adult)	$ 7.00
Family Membership	10.00
Organizational Membership	15.00
Commercial, Business or Professional Membership	25.00
LIFE Membership (Life Memberships, Patron and Benefactor monies go into a special savings fund for future development projects)	100.00
PATRON (Carries Life Member rights, privileges)	500.00
BENEFACTOR (Carries Life Member rights, and privileges)	1,000.00

OUR AIM: "To discover, procure, preserve whatever may relate to the natural, civic, literary and ecclesiastical history of our area."

BISHOP MUSEUM & HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P. O. Box 363, Bishop, California 93514



For further information relative to the Carson & Colorado and the "The Slim Princess;" for historic, sentimental and interesting data on Owens Valley, Eastern Sierra and Western Nevada Railroads and Mining Days, the following is recommended reading:

"Story of Inyo" --- W.A. Chalfant
"Story of Laws" --- Clarabelle Hawkins
"Slim Rails Through the Sand" --- George Turner
"Railroads of Nevada and Eastern Calif." --- David F. Myrick, Vol 1
"Nevada Ghost Towns & Mining Camps" ---Stanley Paher
"Virginia & Truckee" ---Lucius Beebe, Charles Clegg
"100 Years of Real Living" --- Bishop Chamber of Commerce
"Inyo Domini" ---1912, Beautiful Owens Valley
"Gold Guns & Ghost Towns" --- W.A. Chalfant
"Old Mammoth" --- Adele Reed
"Mining Camp Days " --- Emil W. Billeb
"Mines of the Eastern Sierra" --- Mary DeDecker
"Owens Valley As I Knew It" --- Richard Coke Wood
"The Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest" --- Russ & Anne Johnson
"The Ghost Town of Bodie" --- Russ & Anne Johnson
"From this Mountain" --- Likes & Day
"Water Seekers" --- Rami Nadeau
"Death Valley Scotty" --- Hank Johnston
"Land of Little Rain" --- Mary Austin
"Doctor Nellie" --- Dorothy Morrison Doyle Cook
"Story of Early Mono" --- Ella M. Cain
"Story of Bodie" --- Ella M. Cain
"Bodie" --- Wedertz
"We Dug those Dumps" --- Adele Reed
"Album" --- Various Editions
"Boys in the Sky Blue Pants" --- Dorothy Cragen
"Man From Mono" --- Lily LaBraque Mathieu
"Mono Diggins" --- By Wedertz
"Manzanar" --- John Armor & Peter Wright, Photos by Ansel Adams
"Survival Arts of the Primitive Paiutes" --- Margaret M. Wheat

The above and many other books on subjects relative to the Eastern Sierra region may be purchased at the Reception Center at the LAWS RAILROAD MUSEUM.

BISHOP MUSEUM & HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P. O. Box 363, Bishop, California 93514
619—873-5950

COUNTY OF INYO
Department of Museums
Independence, California 93526

HOW TO GET TO LAWS RAILROAD MUSEUM & HISTORICAL SITE.

From Bishop: North on U. S. Highway No. 6 (Tonopah Road) to junction of Silver Canyon (approximately 5 miles from downtown Bishop) thence due east ½ mile. (Open 10:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m. daily). Limited Winter Schedule.

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Laws Railroad Museum local history binder content list

Compiled by Bob Larson (1934-2024).

Collection of magazine articles, newspaper clippings, and other printed ephemera related to the Laws Railroad Museum / Bishop Museum and Historical Society at Bishop, Inyo County, California.

Item compiled by/from the collection of Robert Wood "Bob" Larson (1934-2024). Bob Larson was a teacher at Salinas High School in Salinas, California for many years. Bob inherited his aunt Enid A. Larson's home in Big Pine, Inyo County, California in 1991, and permanently relocated to Big Pine in 2013. He continued his aunt Enid's collection related to Owens Valley History, and he accumulated articles and books on the natural and human history of Inyo County.

From the Inyo County Free Library Local History Room Collection. Scanned by the Inyo County Free Library in March 2026.

Background on the Laws Railroad Museum

Laws was a small town several miles north of Bishop which served as the area's train depot when the Carson & Colorado Railroad began serving the area in 1883. The station and town eventually shuttered when the C&C ceased operation in the mid-20th century.

The Bishop Museum & Historical Society formed in 1964. The Laws Railroad Museum & Historical Site opened on 1 April 1966. The museum is open to the public today. Learn more at https://www.lawsmuseum.org.

Binder contents (in order of appearance):

Pamphlet: Laws Railroad Museum and Historical Village – Bishop, California [c. 2000s?]

Unknown periodical clipping: Photo of Laws museum with caption "Area residents and visitors pack the grounds of the Laws Museum…"

Unknown periodical clipping: Black and white photo of Laws Museum building with caption "Old West buildings and boardwalk guide visitors…"

Poster: Laws Museum – 11 intriging {sic} acres of history

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register* (Bishop, Inyo, California), 23 May 2017, p. V1-2: "20 Mule Team practices the art of jumping the chain west of Bishop"

Unknown periodical clipping [p. 28-29, "Profile 2016-2017"]: "A History in Borax: Full Scale Replica Wagons Join 20 Mule Team" by Kristina Blum

Magazine clipping: *Inyo County*, 11th Edition, p. 6-7. "After a Roundabout Trip, the Borax Wagons are Home at Laws."

Unknown periodical clipping: [*Inyo Register*?] Hand-dated 2018. "These two, huge Borax 20-mule Team Wagons and trailing water tank are at the new wagon barn at the Laws Railroad Museum."

Magazine clipping: *The Inside Eastside Magazine*, Volume 4, August 2018. Cover of the issue featuring Slim Princess engine No. 18 at the Laws Museum.

Unknown periodical / book article: "Laws Railroad Museum and Historical Site – Restoration, Preservation…The Keys to Our Heritage." Includes photos and text about the Laws Museum and history of the town of Laws.

Website printout: mammothweb.com. "Laws Railroad Museum and Historical Site." Includes text on "The Story of Laws," photos and maps.

Magazine article: *Sunset Magazine*, April 1991, p. 34B. "Back to the stream train era, north of Bishop."

Magazine article: *Mammoth Sierra Magazine*, Sep-Oct 2009, p. 12. "Riding the Rails at Laws."

Unknown periodical clipping: "Take a Quiet Retreat Into an Authentic Railroad Past."

Unknown periodical clipping: "Laws Railroad Museum Takes You Back to a Simpler Time."

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register*, 29 Apr 2010, p. A3: "Train buffs roll into town for convention – Group to mark 50th anniversary of railroad's last run with visits to local sites" by Mike Gervais.

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register*, 3 Feb 2009, p. 3: "New textile building going up at Laws Railroad Museum – Laws combines materials from historic homes to build new display."

Periodical clipping: *Inyo County Visitors Guide – Tenth Edition*. "Commerce Along El Camino Sierra."

Magazine article: *Sierra Magazine,* Vol. 1, No. 1., Winter 1971, p. 14-15. "Slim Princess – These Rails Run Backward in Time."

Periodical article: *The Album: Times & Tales of Inyo-Mono*, Vol. IV, No. 1, January 1991, p. 36-40. "The Narrow Gauge Railroad of Owens Valley" by Beverly Webster.

Unknown periodical: "Progress 2015, p. 12." "Slim Princess and Steam – Whistle harkens back to the Inyo County of old" by Jon Klusmire.

Newspaper article: *Inyo Register*, 1 July 2017, p. A15. "The birth of Laws Railroad Museum" by Ted Williams.

Newspaper article: *Inyo Register*, 3 March 2018, p. A14. “The birth of Laws Railroad Museum” by Ted Williams; updated with new content.

Unknown periodical clipping: “What Was Laws, Really? It didn’t set out to become a museum.” Hand dated 4 Dec 1997.

Periodical clipping: *Bishop Visitor’s Guide* [unknown year], p. 35. “History - Laws Railroad Museum.”

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register*, 29 Jan 2009, p. 1. “Real rail rides on track for Bishop? County staff may have worked out lease solution to make Brill Car trips a reality, with no liability for Inyo” by Mike Gervais.

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register*, 23 Apr 2009, p. 5. “Take a ride on the Brill Car…soon – County staff work out deal to allow Laws to give public rides on refurbished relic” by Mike Gervais

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register*, “Museum to offer first rides to public Memorial Day weekend” by Mike Gervais

Document: Donation form from Kenny Scruggs of the Enid Larson Estate to the Bishop Museum and Historical Society (Laws Museum) dated Oct 1991. Lists six items donated to the museum.

Document: Donation form from Enid Larson to the Bishop Museum and Historical Society dated 24 June 1987. Donation of bedstead, box springs and mattress.

Unknown periodical: “Selecting the Railroad Route” by Dave Babb.

Unknown periodical: “Carson & Colorado” by Dave Babb.

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register*, 14 Jan 2017, p. A17. Photo: “The run Engine No. 9 carrying passengers.”

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register*, 31 Jan 2009, p. A10. “New at Laws Railroad Museum” by Larry Pagila.

Unknown periodical: “Laws Museum Celebrates 125 Years.” Hand dated 2010.

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register*, 25 June 2016, p. 15. “The Red Apple Route” by Ted Williams.

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register*, 25 June 2015, p. 14. “Railroad Played Vital Role in Inyo County History into 1960s” by the Eastern California Museum.

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register*, 29 June 2019, p. 14. “Railroad Played Vital Role in Inyo County History into 1960s” by the Eastern California Museum.

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register*, 6 Apr 2010, p. 5. “Museum building projects nearing competition.”

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register*, 6 July 2010, p. 1-3. “A look at living history in the Laws train barn” by Mike Gervais.

Unknown document: “Activities & Attractions – Best Museum: Laws Railroad Museum – We Choo-Choo-Choose You” by Jesse Steele. Hand dated 2013.

Unknown periodical clipping: “All aboard! Laws Museum in Bishop is a straight track to Owens Valley history.”

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register*, 16 July 2016, p. 15. “Laws Museum: Honoring the 50th of the archives” by Pam Vaughn.

Magazine clipping: *Sierra Heritage Museum*, Aug 2016, p. 38-41. “Laws Railroad – Bishop’s Hidden Gem” by Sarah Morey.

Unknown periodical clipping: Hand dated 10 Sep 2016. “Laws Good Ole Days.”

Unknown periodical clipping [*Inyo Register*?]: Hand dated 9 Jan 2017. “Slim Princess could be chugging to Durango.”

Unknown periodical clipping [*Inyo Register*?]: Hand dated 19 Jan 2017. “Railroad group actively raising funds for historic journey” by Terrance Vestal.

Photo of names on plaque. Robert Larson Sr.’s name highlighted. “Laws Museum Memorial 1992.”

Unknown periodical clipping [*Inyo Register*?]: Hand dated 4 July 2017. “Back on Track.”

Unknown periodical clipping [“Profile 2017-18”, p. 12-13]: “Getting the Slim Princess back on track – Carson and Colorado – Community Group of the Year.”

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register*, 22 Jun 2017, p. 1. “Slim Princess comes home – Engine No. 18 moved to Eastern California museum grounds.”

Newspaper clipping: *Inyo Register*, 6 Jun 2020, p. 2: “Bodie Railway and Lumber Company kiosk Installation.”

Unknown document: “At the Laws Railroad Museum and Historical Site See…Carson & Colorado.”

[Revised ICFL-MS 2 April 2026]